

FAR FROM
TO-DAY

BY
GERTRUDE HALL





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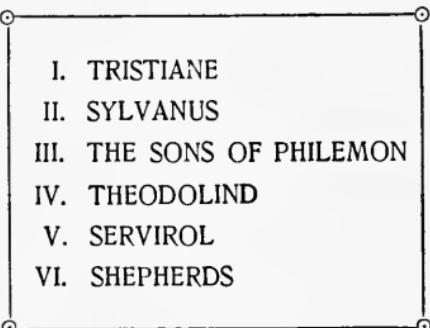
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- I. TRISTIANE
- II. SYLVANUS
- III. THE SONS OF PHILEMON
- IV. THEODOLIND
- V. SERVIROL
- VI. SHEPHERDS

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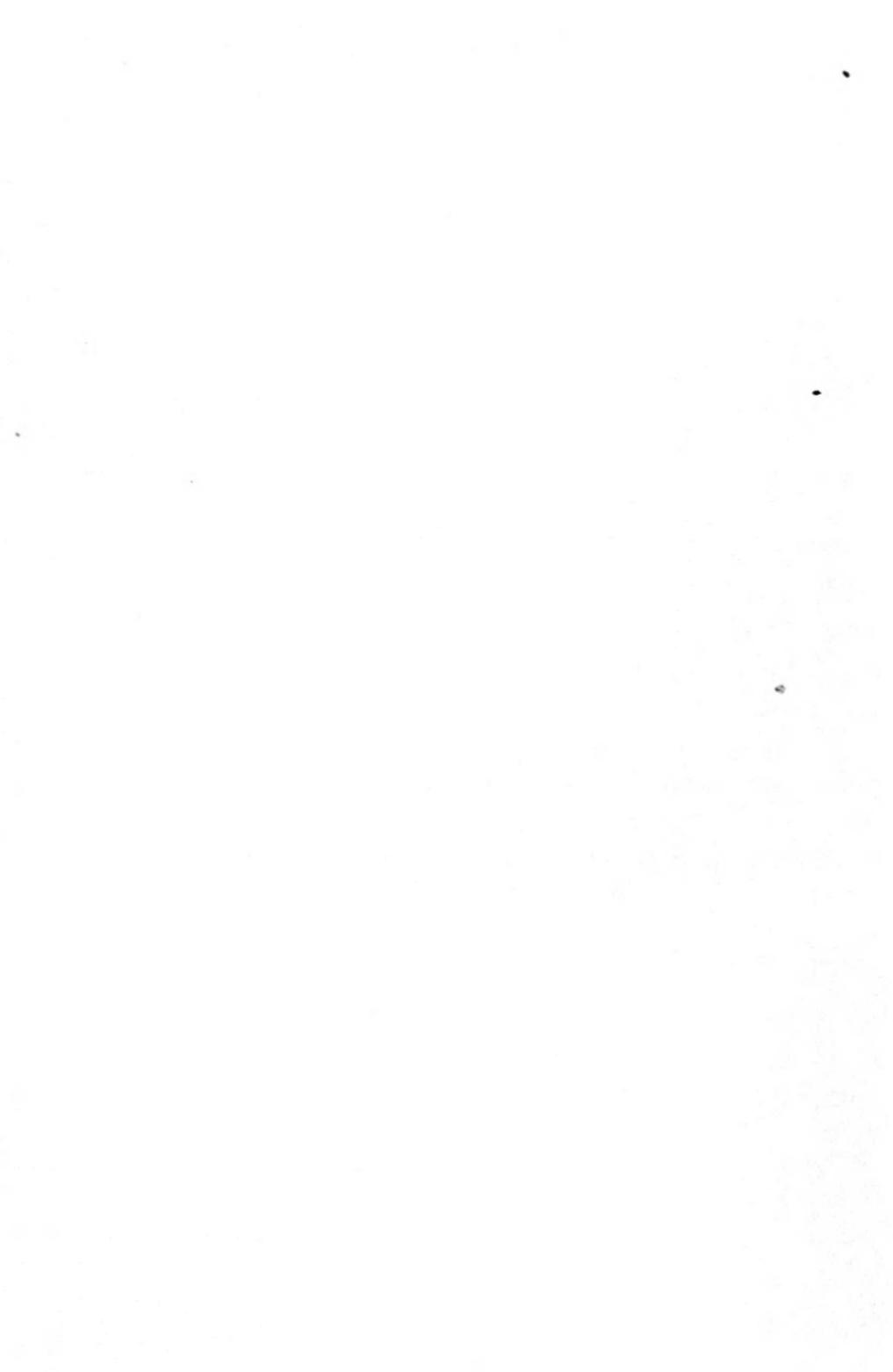
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To my Sisters.

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TRISTIANE.

FAR FROM TO-DAY.

TRISTIANE.

“WE are merrymakers on our way to the capital, whither we are betaking us for the coronation feasts. I am Triflor,” said the leader to the host, who stood still hesitating in the doorway. “Surely you have heard of jolly Triflor, blithe Triflor. And these (come forward, my children!—my lord the host of this fine inn is going to give us all a shelter for the night, because he knows that it is cold sleeping under the stars in the decline of the year, and he is a good gentleman who would not have the harmless amusing folks suffer)—and these, sir, are (forward, children!) Hatto, who eats knives and smacks his lips over them, who can balance straws on the end of his nose, and make faces so droll, the sober water on reflecting them is forced to break into a laugh; Jarl, who can hurl the big rocks, whom you may bind with new ropes if you will, and—cric! crac! a little stiffening of his massive thews,—he is free again; Kahilde and Kabiorg, the matchless dancers,—so light of foot you can afterward cook in their sound shells the eggs upon which they have

trodden ; Tristiane, the woman who tells the truth ; and Ib, tamer of wild beasts — ”

As he spoke their names, the members of that motley company stepped into the large, low, smoky room, lighted by pine boughs that were burning fiercely on the rough stone-hearth : Hatto, the juggler, slim as an ill-conditioned reed, with a long, pointed, humorous nose, and a hungry expression that lent verisimilitude to the leader's report of his appetite for such food even as knives ; the strong man, short and bow-legged, with hairy wrists and a warlike demeanor, yet with eyes more mild than a calf's ; the dancing sisters, pretty and travel-stained and weary, huddled together in a single cloak to keep one another warm ; Tristiane, the woman who told the truth, — the host looked wonderingly, as she entered, at the great form in the dull scarlet garb, with the black wolf-skins hanging from her shoulders.

“ But what is *that* ? ” he asked doubtfully of the new apparition on the threshold.

“ That, ” explained Triflor, “ is the tamer, and that which he leads is the *tamed*. ”

The host leaped backward in the air as he recognized for a lion the strange animal staring at him with stern, yellow eyes from the dusk beyond the doorway.

“ Out of my house ! ” he cried, possessed with a wild dismay. “ Away from my door ! Hold on to the beast, — chain him up ! ”

“ Oh, he is very, *very* tame ; is it not so, Ib ? ” said Triflor, with a smile calculated to disarm. “ Do not get angry ; Hatto might tickle his nose with his straw,

and he would only waggle his tail. Ib, put your hand in the beast's mouth ; you see, he is as gentle as a lamb. He *was*, indeed, very wild, but our brave Ib has entirely subdued him. He will lie quietly under the table while we eat our supper."

"There is a solid iron ring out in the empty ox-stall," said the host, firmly unheedful of Triflor's demonstrations ; "he must go there. The tamer must keep guard over him, and the door must be safely barred. Snorro, show the man into the stall ;" and with anxious precision he shut the door upon lion-tamer and lion.

Ib turned dully from the door without a murmur.

The warm red glare of the pine logs suddenly cut off from the twilight air made it seem darker and colder than before. He could hardly distinguish where he stood,—that dark outline somewhat resembled the old baggage-wagon they took turns at dragging through the day ; that yonder might be a well, and that other a horse-trough,—where was the ox-stall ?

"This way !" he heard a young voice at a little distance from him. He stumbled in the direction whence came the sound, drawing the lion after him.

He came to a covered enclosure that had long, wide openings at about the height of his shoulder. By contrast with the pitchy darkness of the stall, those spans of open night appeared a milky blue-gray.

"The ring is on your right," said the voice, still distant, but in another direction. "Fasten the door, and I will bring you some hay to lay on the ground."

In a few minutes an armful of hay came down

upon his head. Looking up, he was able to distinguish against the sky a wild-haired, boyish outline.

“What is his name?” said the voice, in a tone of deep interest.

“He has no name.” Then, with a sudden bitter vehemence: “It is a mortification of the spirit to be called by a name not yours; and as I do not know what those other fierce kings, his brothers, used to call him in their language, I leave him uninsulted by a lesser appellation.”

“Now, me,” said the boy, not quite understanding, “when they want me they say, ‘Snorro! Snorro,’ they say, ‘get up! Snorro, go to work!’ What I ask you is, when you want him to come —”

“No need to want. I have him at the end of a chain. Go, child. Leave us alone. The lion wishes to sleep.”

“I will bring him a marrow-bone.” He scrambled down the wall, and the sound of his footsteps died away in the night.

Ib spread the straw on the cold ground and sat down upon it, so that the lion’s great, heavy head rested upon his knees. The yellow eyes glowed at him in the darkness. He passed his thin hands through the thick, rough mane, clutching at it with a fierce caress. “They have turned us away,” he said, talking in incoherent murmurs to the brute, “because we look so dangerous and so bad, my friend. They are afraid of us. They do not know how cold and sad and sick we are. They say, ‘See the treacherous eye; see,’ they say, ‘the gleaming fangs.’ It would seem they wished to mock us,—but they cannot know that, with the will, we have scarcely the power to

attack the meanest cur that lives, we are so weary, so cold, so homesick, so fallen,— alas ! so fallen.. Ugh, the loathsome world ! the loathsome people ! How they laugh and shout at us when we come before them in fool's gear, led in derision by a slender flower-chain, poor, despised, discrowned royalty ! They cannot see it burn, then, in the once proudly flashing eye,— blear to-day,— the remembrance of times when their faces had blanched with terror at the sound of a certain mighty voice, when their feet had been so bound with fear they could not have stirred from the path. Now they say to us, 'Come,' and we come ; 'Go,' and we go. They lift an impatient hand to strike us, and we lower our lessened heads, submitting,— we are so frozen and so forlorn. We have not strength now to rebel, no, nor spirit to resist — ”

He put his arms round the lion, who was shivering with cold, and buried his face on the shaggy head. He felt a warm, moist touch repeated slowly again and again on his cheek, streaked with burning tears. Thus they cowered silently together.

The dark ether kindled slowly with tremulous points of fire. But what dim light entered the stall scarcely served to distinguish the formless mass of man and lion closed in a monstrous embrace. Heavy, broken sighs alone interrupted the silence, and occasionally peals of distant laughter ringing from the inn, or a few notes, louder than the rest, from Triflor's shrill instrument.

“ He is piping for the wenches to dance,” said Ib to himself ; and at the sound arose in his mind a clear image of the whole scene,— Triflor sweating over

the music, with cheeks expanded to bursting, beating the measure with one flat foot; the girls dancing, with slender arms intertwined, weariness lending a certain languid grace to their movements; Hatto looking on, leaning against the wall in his favorite attitude, one spindle leg across the other, his elbows pointed out jauntily from his hips, his head thrown back, his face distorted in a gleeful grimace that exposed all his sharp, uneven teeth; Jarl in a corner, diligently pulling at his stiff beard to keep himself awake, and nodding notwithstanding; the host and inn-people in ecstasies of delight over the unusual entertainment; Suorro, quite forgetful of marrow-bones and the like, holding his sides at Hatto's facial pranks; and Tristiane — the woman from the mountains? — he could not place her in the scene his vivid imagination painted. He had not known her long enough to be sure, without seeing, what her part would be in the merry gathering. Perhaps she was watching the fun and dancing, listening to Triflor's jests, without smiling. He had not yet seen her smile, and could only picture her face as wearing a look of calm wonder, or less than wonder, perhaps, — calm curiosity; her eyes, used to resting upon dark mountain outlines and deep fir-forests swaying in the north wind, and turbulent mountain streams, expressing mild interest, but scarcely amusement, at such antics. Or yet, perhaps, with as calm disregard of the noisy proceedings, she had turned from them, and sat gazing at the fire that flung her great majestic shadow upon wall and ceiling.

Ib drew from his satchel a piece of dark bread

and offered it to the lion, who sniffed at it languidly, and refused it. He bit at it himself, but it seemed too bitter food. He restored it to the satchel, and once more pillow'd his head on the lion's.

Gradually, with the course of hours, the merry sounds from the inn became less, then ceased altogether, and a deep stillness held the night.

Ib, wearied out with a long day's march, slumbered restlessly, waking every now and then with a start, and wondering wildly where he might be. Was that a dungeon in which he lay, awaiting death? At the relief remembrance brought, beads of cold sweat stood on his brow. He tried to keep awake to avoid the horror of dreams, but the weight of excessive physical fatigue drew down his lids in spite of his endeavor. He had finally fallen into a deeper sleep, and was wholly unconscious when a soft golden light dawned and grew slowly upon the upper portion of the wall and the rough beams over his head, lending each jutting edge a distinct dark shadow. A cock somewhere, mistaking the sudden light for the dawn, crowed lustily. At the shrill sound Ib started guiltily, as Peter may have done, and lay motionless, trembling. His fears had somewhat subsided, and he dared to stir a little,—the rustling of the straw comforted him,—as he lay wondering at the dim glory overhead, when he thought to hear a voice speaking his name: "Ib! Ib!—"

He did not answer. His heart burned and quivered within him.

"Ib," said the voice once more. Then again, after a pause, "Ib, are you cold?"

Reassured, he rose to his feet and looked out into the night.

A late half-moon had just risen above the low level of the horizon, and hung there, a great, dull, golden jewel. Its rays touched and brightened faintly one side of the figure that was standing without; but the face of it was completely in the shade. Still, from their great shadowy sockets Ib could feel the unseen eyes of Tristiane fixed upon him.

"I came to bring you that,"—she reached him the black wolf-skins.

"You are thanked," said Ib, receiving them. "Ib is not ungrateful."

"Why do you tell me," she asked quietly, "that your name is Ib? Ib is not your name."

At the unexpected words Ib fell back a pace, paling in the dark. "You are mistaken," he said, with dry lips that almost refused their office, "I am indeed so called."

"Why will you lie?" said Tristiane.

There was a pause, during which Ib heard nothing but his heart hammering in his ears. "Do you know," he asked finally, in a hoarse, tremulous whisper, "what my name is? Speak low,—in charity."

"No," said Tristiane. "I know only this, that you are not what you would appear. I know, poor soul, how wretched and heavy-laden you are. Your shifting eyes and hood drawn closely over your ashen face have told their story to me,—and your heavy footsteps, and voice without ring. You are too humble, too patient of blows, to be merely the low churl you seem. The sorrow I read in your eyes is too

great for a contemptible soul. What have you to hide? My heart has cried out for pity at sight of you. I have yearned to assist you. Ease your soul of its secret to me. Tristiane, who never lies, gives you her faith, in face of all the holy stars, that no harm shall come to you through her, but that the burden that crushes you shall be made lighter by her helping you to bear."

"Go your way," cried Ib, in hot, frightened excitement. "What have you to do with me? I did not call you,—you are a stranger. You do not even seem one like me, but of a greater and goodlier race. Go your way, go your way!"

And then, unaccountably, as he looked at her, it seemed as though on the utter darkness of his soul a door had been suddenly opened, beyond which shone a little light. Bewildered with a tremulous joy at the bare thought of even such partial release from the tenebrous desolation that surrounded him, "Wait, wait!" he cried, as she turned slowly to go. With wonderful agility he climbed the wall and leaped over it, and stood at her side. He clung to her hand. "Your pity has prevailed," he said. "There is something in your face that calls for perfect trust. I am impelled to tell you, woman known one day, what through the changes of many moons I have jealously hidden from the very air of heaven —"

Then, struck by a sudden torturing thought, he broke short and dropped her hand. "Alas!" he cried dolorously, "but even you will shrink away from me when I tell you of the blood upon my hands."

"No," said Tristiane. "I knew of it."

“Then” — he again seized her hand — “come with me out of the moon.” He drew her hurriedly toward the shadow of the ox-stall. As they crossed the moonlit space, their shadows fell in strange contrast on the dark earth, — one so simply drawn and large; the other so small and bent, with crooked knees, and a fantastic head sunk deep between the shoulders.

“My name,” said Ib, almost in her ear, “is not Ib, as you, who carry out the prophecy of ancient sagas, were aware as soon as my lying lips pronounced the word. I — am Magnus Magnusson —” He stopped, breathing hard. Then he went on more rapidly. “That name, all unknown to you, is not so in the capital to which our steps bring us daily nearer. When you are there, you will, no doubt, hear it often enough spoken, — I do not know whether more in horror or contempt. Some one will point out to you the splendid lions hewn in stone on the steps of the king’s palace, and say, ‘Those were made by Magnus, son of Magnus,’ then, turning from them, will tell you a story of fame turned to infamy. But you will not believe me as evil as they make me, — only so weak, so much weaker than they could conceive!

“You see, I was poor, obscure, cutting stone for miserable bread, when there rose in me, a low-born youth with nothing but a high-sounding name, a passionate thirst for honor and ease, and the companionship of the great, to whom I looked up as to bright stars. Looking back on those days of my earliest dreams of glory, I try to think there was something generous, something not wholly ignoble

in me ; but I do not know,—I do not know. Inch by inch, steadily I rose, by the bare strength of a sleepless ambition. It was not easy for me, but I never ceased one hour from the whole effort of body and soul. From the common stone, finally, I made the perfect things you shall perhaps see. I gazed through the bars at the king's lions in their den ; then formed their shapes in marble, gloriously idealized. I gained reverence through the hard-won skill of my right hand. I arrived at the greatness I had coveted. The king himself begged me to adorn his house with shapes of strength and beauty. Admiring men came to me and said humbly, 'Master, teach us !' Clad in my new robes of dignity, I tried to forget, disown, the days when I had hungered unsatisfied.

" Among those who came to learn of me was one, a foster-brother to the young prince whose coronation we are going to see ; he put his sharp chisel carelessly to the stone, and lo ! it lived. What I had spent my youth and health in acquiring, some god had flung to him in reckless lavishness. A burning bitterness surged in my heart at sight of his work,—a slow, consuming hatred of him ; for I discovered in his eye a lurking contempt of me. It seemed to say, 'The world knows you not, but I know you.' It seemed somehow he was aware of the low origin I concealed, and the old struggles I denied as though they had been ignominious. He found nothing to respect in the long effort by which I had lifted myself from the level sea of insignificance,—only something to laugh at in my petty weaknesses. I felt,

though I never saw him do it, that he mocked, with the strange cruelty of youth, the peculiarities of my person,—my gait, that I had studied to make grave and dignified (my low stature had always been a vexation to me, but by my sternly erect carriage I had arrived at appearing almost tall); my manner of speech, that I had not succeeded in rendering soft and polished as that of the inhabitants of the court, where I now figured as an honored guest. He spoke to me as to a slave, that a free-born man, out of his own nobility, refrains from calling slave! I knew by some subtle sense, the property of morbidly sensitive vanity, that he held me up to the laughter of his companions and the women of the palace. I thought I caught sneering side-glances from their eyes, yet never anything I could complain of, appeal from. My life was poisoned. I was too small to rise above the intangible offence of their ridicule.

“The king said to me one day, ‘Make me two bold lions to support my throne.’ Then my enemy, who stood by, spoke—the dastard—from his high advantage, ‘Let the son of Magnus make one lion, and I will make the other.’ The king laughed at his audacity, and said, ‘So let it be.’ My hair was growing prematurely white with the toils of a storm-beaten life; his face was blooming with its first golden down. There was a deep, refined cruelty to me in letting us vie together, whatever the issue of our emulation. I could not work well with so much stifled, corroding hatred in my heart. My mallet grew heavy, my chisel unsure; the glory had gone out of my work. It was a botch. When I was forced to own

that, I shed tears wrung from the bitterest humiliation. Then, like a thief, I slipped into the room where his statue stood, finished, as I had heard. Yes, his was all that could be wished. How it would shine beside mine, my young pupil's! How every one would turn from mine to admire the perfection of his, and speak of it aloud before me! In an access of uncontrollable rage I lifted my mallet — But no! I was not so base; it was only the momentary evil impulse of vanity at bay. As I lowered my arm, I suddenly perceived him in the door-way, beneath the half-drawn curtain. He stood there, the strippling, in all the insolent beauty of his youth, looking at me from between his half-closed golden lashes, his lips slightly curled in a smile. His face said plainly, 'I looked to find him here, the peacock who hides his feet! Fortunately, I am here in person to defend my work from his felonious hands. How amused the world will be to-morrow, when I shall tell of this: the great master who sneaks in at night to mar a rival's labor!' In an instant, before he could cry out, he was stretched on the ground at my feet, the scorn transfixed on his lips, my hammer driven so deep in his skull I had afterward not strength to withdraw it."

The son of Magnus hid his face in his hands; his whole miserable frame shook with horrified shuddering at the remembrance of that scene. "But the worst was not that," he went on,—"not that I found myself a murderer; the worst was when, the deed accomplished, I found myself to be a coward. I, to whom the respect of others, the esteem of myself,

was more than food or air, found myself trembling with abject fear of the consequences of what I had done. They would be fatal, I knew; for I had never been truly beloved, only borne with and respected for the sake of my talents; and now, who would find the least excuse for me, who conceive any motive in me but meanest jealousy of the gifts of that youth, whose very faults had been as bright and bewitching as my only virtues were sombre and unattractive? No one would understand, or feel the least poor pulse of pity for one whose sun had so suddenly gone down forever. And then, unexpectedly, vile physical fear, such as I had, to that day unproved, thought my nature incapable of, surged in me and discolored my lips at the thought of pangs the flesh can be made to suffer. Veiling my eyes from the sight of my victim, I slunk from the palace and fled into the night. From the moment I took on that vesture of fear I seemed to shrink in stature; and when, as part of my disguise having shaved my worshipful beard, my face appeared to men as my internal nature had suddenly appeared to my own inner eyes, stripped of all charitable veils,—my face showed the weak, mean mouth of a coward I had worn hidden beneath the dense hair, even as my soul revealed the shameful weakness I had striven to cover and ignore. Homeless vagabond from that hour, unrecognizable in my humble guise, I wandered as far as possible from the scene of my fall, suspicious and afraid of every shadow by day, hag-ridden by night.

“And lo! the strange colors my life takes on! When I had reached a place that seemed safe, comes

across my path the lion that, from a seeming likeness to myself, my starving heart clings to,— for is not he too an exile, he too debased from high estate, a mockery of himself, weak, and early old from the inclemency of Fate? And I must stay with him,— a man cannot live wholly loveless!— and with him become a servant's servant to Triflor,— no condition too vile for me now! And suddenly dies the old king, and Triflor sees good to be present at the coronation of the young prince, and a horrible attraction draws me, too, back to the old haunts I have shunned,— a strange excess of fear. For the habit of fear has grown on me. When I tremble now, it is with the accumulated terror of months. It seems to me that if some one now in my presence were to speak of Magnus, in a very ecstasy of fright I should be forced to leap up and cry, 'I am Magnus!' All else in me has been degraded and lost in that feeling, all the lofty qualities I boasted of in the days of my pride. Sometimes in the still of the night I try to remember what little good I, who thought myself not a bad man, really did in those days; and, alas! it seems so little that I doubt if I was ever good at all. And do you know what is my greatest torment now? That in thinking of the man I killed I always see his face as it was at his best and brightest. In his eye that persecutes me is no hatred, his lips wear no scorn, till I almost doubt he ever wronged me, and none of the justice, only the blackness, of my deed remains."

Ib ceased, staring at the visionary face. The moon had gained on the shadow in which they had stood.

Tristiane was full in the silvery light, but Ib still in the dark.

“And now,” he said, turning to her once more,— and there was a wild appeal in his voice,— “I have told you what manner of man I am, I have placed my life in your hands,— what will you do with my life? How will you, who have never done wrong, deal with me, whose whole life has been evil?”

Then Tristiane said slowly: “I will be your friend. I will love you. I will shield you in all the days of your danger. I am strong. Oh, my wounded, way-worn brother, lean upon me and rest!” She held out her hands to him.

Ib did not take them, but stood startled and hesitating, as though suddenly in a dream something of peace and joy and promise of redemption had come into the night of his life, and he feared to move lest he should wake; then, as his slow brain seized the value of her words, he fell forward at her feet, and clasped his arms about her knees, and hid his face in her garment, sobbing like a little child.

At dawn the strange caravan moved on southward over the saddening land, beginning to wither and turn brown in the autumnal air. Last of all in the fantastic procession came Ib, leading the lion, his eyes turning forever through the weary marches upon the great figure of Tristiane, whether distinguished far ahead, seeming to help, with one careless hand, Jarl with his wagon-load, or lingering behind with the foot-sore Kabiorg. The unswerving devotion of his gaze still followed her when the light failed, and

she seemed but a shadow within the shade ; and when at last they had reached a resting-place for the night, and they might talk softly together awhile, and his face rest a little upon her hands, the world seemed less a foe, and life less wholly accursed.

Day by day the little troupe neared the capital. At last, one evening at sunset, they came in sight of its towers glowing faintly far away in the dying red light. Triflor clapped his hands and shouted with wild delight. Ib felt himself grow cold to the heart. A black mist hid the distant prospect from his eyes. He stopped, overcome, and would have sunk upon the earth but that he felt the strong hand of Tristiane. He looked up at her. They walked on together without speaking.

The merrymakers came constantly in contact with other travellers approaching the capital by the same road. Now splendid companies of horsemen passed them ; now groups of peasants in their holiday clothes.

The feasts of the coronation, which were to last seven days, were within one day of beginning, when Triflor, in his tinsel, for the first time stood on his little platform, clashing his cymbals to attract the passers' attention, and in the pauses of the deafening music inviting them to enter his booth and enjoy for a small consideration the wonders therein to be displayed. The crowd flocked in under the old curtain, eager to be amused, — a lazy, happy, holiday crowd, that laughed heartily at Hatto's tricks, and wondered with wide eyes at the ease with which Jarl lifted huge weights, and held them balanced in one knotty hand. The girls in spangled kirtles danced daintily before

their admiring eyes, waving their long bright scarfs. Ib, with a feint of trepidation, led forward the lion,— who, worn out and impotent and half-blind as he was, still looked rather formidable,— and astonished the lookers-on by placing his hand in the terrible red mouth of the beast, and making him leap through a hoop, and perform other clown's feats. Then Kahilde led him around, the fierce desert king, by a flower-chain, to symbolize the triumph of Love; Ib following her at a few steps' distance with a drawn sword, to impress the people with a sense of her risk. The pallor of his strange, hollow face as he stood up before the many eyes, and the drops of sweat that appeared on his forehead as at a sudden wild wave of the lion's tail the crowd broke out in a loud cry, lent a touch of reality to his acting. The crowd gave a sigh of relief when he finally led the lion out of their sight.

Tristiane had been standing apart, idly leaning against one of the roof-supporting shafts, half hidden by the evergreens that for ornament had been twined about them, intermingled with bright berries. Carelessly, when Ib had vanished, she let her eyes stray over the heads of the spectators. They had been fastened for a few seconds on one,— the only one there whose face, rising above the rest, was on a level with her own,— when Triflor came up to her, and suddenly drew the attention of the whole crowd upon her. He pointed at her with the end of his wand: "This," he said, "is the Woman who tells the truth."

Tristiane stood composed and unembarrassed under the scrutiny of so many eyes.

Suddenly some one at the farther end of the booth broke out laughing. Triflor caught up the laugh. "Ha! the gentleman laughs. He thinks such a woman should indeed be set up at a show, like a strange and very rare animal. The manner of Tristiane, this truthful woman, however, is perhaps different from what the gentleman has supposed." Then, addressing the whole community: "Do you know the saying in the legend of long ago,—that one who in all his days has not lied shall surely be able to tell falsehood from truth in others? That does my Tristiane. That her presence may not seem a reproach to the ladies here who cannot do as much," he added apologetically, "I will confess that she has lived, deep among the unpopulous mountains, a life of perhaps enforced innocence. To account for her superior size, we must suppose her to have fed on strange fruits. Her fame as a seer reached me as I was passing through those parts, and taking advantage of a sudden awakened instinct of curiosity in her concerning the world of smaller and less truthful beings, I was enabled to bring her thus far."

From the statuesque repose of her face one might have supposed Tristiane quite unconscious of Triflor's words.

"Approach, approach, and put her to the test," pursued Triflor; "approach,—however clever you may be, you cannot hope to baffle her."

The crowd came a little nearer, laughing faintly in wonder, not knowing exactly what to say to her.

"Come," said Triflor, encouragingly, "see for yourselves. Tell me, Tristiane, is it not so, that I had

some excellent sausages and cabbages for my early meal?"

Tristiane shook her head.

"No more did I. You see, ladies and gentlemen, she does not know that I had bacon and onions, but is sure I ate no cabbage."

"My name is Knut,—is that not so?" asked a voice at her right hand.

She looked around at a strong sunburned fellow with gold rings in his ears.

"Yes; Knut."

"And I peddle earthen pipkins in a great basket about town for a living?"

"No."

"But I plough and dig the earth, watering it with sweat, for a harvest?"

"No."

"Then, perhaps, I am a cook of my great Lord Sweyn's, and fashion dainty dishes for his tooth?"

"No."

The crowd showed signs of interest. Several broke in with questions. But Tristiane fixed her attention only on the man with the ear-rings.

"Then I tell you finally: I live by water,—carrying it in jars as it is wanted for the luxurious bath of some fair court-lady."

"No."

"No? Should you say that I was a seaman, then?"

Tristiane nodded assent. The man started. A murmur of wonder passed through the crowd.

"And my ship, the 'Viking,' reached land last night?"

“Your ship. Not the ‘Viking.’

“And we are not to spread sails again until the feasts are over, and young Erik established king over us.”

“Erik the glove, and Sweyn the hand !” said a voice somewhere in the crowd, that, however, no one heeded. “Erik the mask, and Sweyn the face.”

And now Tristiane was assailed with questions from all sides. Something of awe came into the faces of the people as she answered them one after the other; no question trivial enough to make her quiet eyes disdainful, nor so cunning and clever as to make her hesitate in answering. She stood looking over their heads with far-seeing eyes that seemed scarcely aware of them. Gradually the questions, asked at first with light, eager curiosity, grew fewer, and it came to seem a rather solemn thing to stand under those deep eyes and have untruth denounced.

“Tristiane,” said a voice just near her, when finally silence had fallen on the people, “now heed me awhile.”

She turned to the speaker, — the tall man who had arrested her attention before, the only one whose eyes met hers from an equal height. He was dressed in a common garb, and judging from that, might have been a peasant. A fierce red beard hid the lower part of his face. There was a keen brightness in the light of his steadfast eye.

Tristiane returned his firm, large-eyed gaze; then, as he was beginning to speak, interrupted him.

“Why will you speak ? Your garb is a lie. Your conduct is a lie. Those clothes do not belong to you,

nor does the character you assume. You have no need to speak to be told by me that you are lying." And then, more gently, as she looked at him whose eyes were on hers as steadfastly as before, unabashed by her reproach: "What need have you to demean yourself? You are brave enough to keep true, and strong enough, and great-hearted and noble enough, as I can see."

The booth was finally deserted; Triflor and Hatto and Jarl went forth to seek what amusement or interest the city might afford them. The little dancers, weary, retired to rest. Tristiane remained with Ib, who had been left to keep guard over Triflor's possessions.

"I am crushed with the weight of memories," he said to her. "It seems but a day since I passed through these streets at night, a trembling shadow. I can still feel the blood upon my clothes. It had come to seem a little like the past, to have a little the dimness of a dream; but now again I feel the heat at my heart I felt in my earliest remorse, and I cannot free myself of the thought he must be still lying undiscovered beside his blood-bespattered masterpiece."

Tristiane comforted him with her hand, laid gently on his head in the dumb eloquence of pity too deep for words. He lifted his head from between his knees, and looked up at her.

"Your face dispels the vision," he said, after intent gazing. "Your touch makes my head cool. I can almost think sometimes that I have been forgiven, for your sake, because you have cared about my mis-

ery. When I look at you long — long — there seems to come to me a voice from somewhere far away that whispers to my heart a promise of peace, to be fulfilled some time, — before I die, perhaps, or after. Surely it was a token of some relenting in Heaven toward me that you should come to me at the time of my most hopeless pain. You have lifted me a little out of the slough where I am fallen. From your complete courage I have gained this little strength : that I do not pity myself any more, but exult with a savage gladness that I have suffered so much, suffer so much, and can perhaps, at length, with my exquisite torture hope to pay my just debts and stand up a free soul again. Tristiane, Tristiane," seizing hold of her, like a frightened child, "say again that you will not leave me. Sometimes, in dreams, my suspicious soul tells me that you have gone ; and then when I awake, though it is still black night, it seems like the dear dawn to me, thinking, 'I have you yet.' You are the last spar to which a desperate man is clinging, who but for you must sink in a sea whence is never a re-arising."

He clung to her arms as though indeed to save himself from death, his haunted eyes straining from their orbits. She soothed him as a mother her delirious child.

He grew quiet again at her words ; and being full of memories, went on in a rambling way to talk half to her, half to himself, of his old home and old friends, and old acts and thoughts.

"I wonder who now lives in the quiet house at the end of the street, — the quiet street. I had a

little garden enclosed by high walls. There was a fir-tree. There was a dark pool by which I used to sit and meditate. I could watch in it the reflection of the sky. I remember a little rosy sunset-cloud I saw melt away there one night. Swallows had built under my roof. I used to water a rose-tree. Oh, how could I love such simple things as I did, and yet be a bad man ? How could it be, Tristiane ? And my old brown volumes I used to read when I was tired of wielding the mallet ; and my shapely lions that I made ! Oh ! if it could be," he groaned, and tears of yearning homesickness crowded in his eyes, "that I might find myself once more watching the rosy cloud float in the well of my own garden ; that I should stand in my own walls, about each stone of which a thousand memories wreath, and hew into beauty the spotless marble, humming, perhaps, as I used ; that men like myself might take me again by the hand, and converse with me pleasantly of arts and dreams and destinies ! I never loved my fellow-beings very warmly ; there seemed to be an insuperable barrier between us, somehow. I was still a solitary soul when I lived in intimate communion with them ; but now, how I could faithfully love the least among them,— if I were only as I used to be,— if I were just worthy to touch their hands !"

Tristiane led him gradually to forget as he answered her questions concerning the city and its inhabitants and customs. She listened attentively.

"And Sweyn ? Who is Sweyn ? I have heard that name twice to-day."

“He,” said Ib, “is the captain of the king’s guards. We were not friends. I never liked him, by reason of the difference between us; and now I think I could love him for that same reason. He is in high favor with young Erik,—an idle, ease-loving boy, Erik, beloved mostly for the sake of his father. I have heard say that Sweyn, no doubt, will wield the sceptre, whilst the other wears the crown. He is worshipped by the people for his daring deeds in battle. He is great in body as in soul. The glamour of glory is about his name. He is a hero.”

Tristiane could not sleep that night for the many new thoughts that fermented in her brain. The long hours of darkness for her were painted with ever-shifting figures and scenes, through which shone one starlike idea, and illumined them all with clear, unvarying rays.

At sight of her on the following day, Ib was impressed with the set purpose in her face.

“What are you going to do, Tristiane?” he asked, in wonder at it.

“Do not ask me, Ib. It is true that I have a deed to perform. I think, maybe, it was because I fore-felt it dimly, that I was impelled to leave the quiet shepherd-folk and mingle with this strange, great world.”

Ib looked at her with troubled, anxious eyes.

“Where are you going, Tristiane?” he cried, seizing hold of her hand, when in the evening she was about to go forth on her secret mission. “Do not go, Tristiane.”

Tristiane turned back with a smile that reassured him.

“It is for the best,” she said, and departed.

He walked up and down, up and down like a caged lion, as long as her absence lasted. Weak tears of relief came to his eyes as she stood before him again.

“Oh, you must not leave me,” he pleaded. “I feel as if I had lost you forever each time you go from my sight. It is like suffering death over and over again. And to have you go, not being able to follow you with my persistent thought,—I was all afloat in a black sea, Tristiane. Say you will not go again.”

But Tristiane shook her head.

“I must, Ib. It is best.”

“Oh, why have you secrets from me who have shown you all my heart? But no; forgive me, Tristiane. I will not complain. No, I am content; only say you will always surely, surely come back to me, and I will hold my peace.”

But his anxious eyes dogged her every least movement on the days that followed, and an unconquerable pain convulsed his face at her repeated absences. At her return each time, with redoubled silent fervor, he clung to the blessing of her presence.

“You look so happy, Tristiane,” he said once. “Your face wears a hopeful, expectant look. For what pleasant thing are you waiting?”

And another time he said with a sharp, sorrowful voice,—

“Do not look at me like that, Tristiane,—as if you did not see me at all, but some one else beyond,—as

if some great person stood behind me, and I were too small and insignificant to conceal him in the least, and the sound of my voice were lost to you in rapt contemplation of him. Ah, Tristiane," with sudden anguish, "what has come between us? Sometimes now, though I hold your hand and see your face, I feel as if you were far away and lost to me utterly." But at the pained, startled look she gave him he went on penitently: "No, no, Tristiane, do not have any care of what I say. You know I am never quite in my right mind nowadays. Make allowances for me. No, nothing is true but that you have been good to me and are not going to forsake me."

One morning she found him laboring under a terrible agitation.

"Tristiane, I cannot hide from you what I have seen," he said. "Silence would strangle me. You must tell me what is the gold ring fastened around your neck."

Tristiane instinctively lifted her hand to her neck, and felt the gold ring there stirred with the sudden wild pulsation of her heart.

"I was waiting for you to return last night, and as I waited sleep overtook me. When I woke, the first pale glimmer of dawn lighted the sky. I had not heard your footsteps as you came back, and for my peace I must make sure with my eyes that you were near. So I crept to where you slept, and was satisfied, and about to retire, when I distinguished by the faint light a glitter on your bare neck that could scarcely be a stray lock of your hair. I came nearer,—I could not help it,—and — Whose ring is that great, golden,

strangely chiselled ring, that might fit the hand of Thor ? For whom are you leaving me, Tristiane ? Why are you deceiving me ?”

There was that in her face when she said, “ Will you not trust me, Ib ?” that made his anger vanish as mist.

“ Yes, I will, — I will !” he cried, with a passionate revulsion of feeling. “ You shall never hear another murmur from me. How dare I question you ! I will trust you as far as death, and farther. I will trust you as the true and steadfast stars that return every night forever, and that it would be a stupid, blasphemous thought to doubt.”

“ How your face shines, Tristiane !”

The great day had finally arrived. The whole population had flocked to the chief streets of the city to see the new king borne in triumph foremost in the glittering procession.

From where they had stayed quietly at home in the old booth Ib and Tristiane could hear faintly the joyous acclamations of the people, and the noises of pipes and drums. Ib had not dared to venture forth.

“ How your face shines, Tristiane !” he had said innumerable times that day. Whenever he looked at her, it struck him anew. “ Why does your face shine ?”

But she had not told him. When he grew restless and excited at the noises without, she took his hand quietly in her own, and made him tell her about his old home, and the fir-tree, and the well, and the swallows under the roof. It always seemed he could never stop when he began talking of them.

“ How would it be with you,” said Tristiane, turning her shining face away, as if her secret must appear written there, “ if one should say to you, ‘ You may go back to the old house. The past shall be forgiven, the dark days forgotten. You shall sit again under your own trees, and watch the peaceful sky reflected in the well of your own garden ? ’ ”

“ Do not say such things to me,” cried out Ib, in anguish. “ You were never cruel before. Do you not see that you are torturing me to death ? ”

Tristiane was silent, but she pressed his hand hard to her side to keep from speaking.

“ How your face shines, Tristiane ! — how your face shines ! ”

It seemed to her the light had never been so long in fading away before. She came to the door and lifted the curtain certainly a hundred times, to see how much the sun had declined. Finally the red glow began to narrow in the clouds, and left them gray. The streets were again full of the people that had before been massed together in the heart of the city. The merrymakers got home, Triflor bursting with food for conversation. The lights were lit in the booth ; everything was made ready for the nightly performance, sure to be attended by great crowds on such a holiday.

Finally, that too was over.

“ Do not leave me to-night,” said Ib, holding Tristiane by the hem of her garment. “ I am so filled with strange fears and forebodings. My heart stops at every sound. I need to know that you are near, to live through the night.”

“ I will be back in a little while. Do not ask me where I am going. I cannot tell you,—not yet. It may be you too will be glad to-morrow. Good-night.”

The sky was full of stars. Tristiane walked on hurriedly. The streets were still alive with people; it was too great a holiday to go to bed. She proceeded without hesitation, as going over well-known ground. Finally she came to the king’s dwelling. She showed a ring at the palace-door, and was led in unquestioned. Passing through the corridors, her ears were met with mingled sounds of music and wassail and laughter. They grew less as she approached a well-known chamber, far apart; and when she had entered it, and the heavy bear-skin curtain had dropped behind her, she found herself again in perfect stillness. Her heart was beating loud with emotion. She held her glad eyes fixed upon the door opposite the one through which she had come. She had not waited long, though it seemed long to her impatient spirit, when the curtain was suddenly lifted.

Tristiane moved one quick step forward, then stopped short, and stared in dumb, pleased wonder at the man who had entered.

She had seen him before: once, the first time, in peasant’s attire,—for it was the tall man with the red beard,—and many times since in plain soldier’s garb; but never him nor any one arrayed with similar magnificence.

A long mantle, lined with costly furs, snowy and soft, fell in stately folds from his shoulders. His purple tunic was bordered with gold. A heavy roll

of twisted gold, the two meeting ends of which were beaten in similitude of lions' heads, curled around his powerful neck, and betokened his exalted rank.

His face, in unison with his apparel, that night had assumed a sudden splendor. His vigorous beard and crisp long hair shone like burnished metal. His eyes had the steady gleam of jewels; his great brow the purity and polish of some precious marble; his lips a more vivid purple than his garment. An inward fire of gladness, a mighty purpose, seemed to have lent his heroic stature almost godlike proportions.

"Welcome, Tristiane!" he said to her, approaching.

"And is it Sweyn?" asked Tristiane, abashed; for he scarcely seemed the same man she had importuned so many days with her insistent prayers.

"Even Sweyn."

"You wear such a glad visage to-night, I know that you have gained of the king the pardon I have asked. Is it not so? The son of Magnus may return to his home, and have restored to him his wealth and his work, and something of the old peace and the dignity that is more to him than air to breathe. Is it not so? Ah, you are good,—good,—good!" Tristiane, with impulsive gratitude, seized his hand and bent to kiss it. Sweyn withdrew it quickly.

"I am glad to-night, but not for that, Tristiane," he said.

Tristiane uttered a faint cry of sorrow, and the shining light went out of her face. "You have not obtained it yet? And I must come again, and still

again and again ! Do you know how many times you have said 'Come to-morrow' to me, — how many times I have come here burning with hope, and gone away chilled with disappointment ? I thought that this should be the last. You promised to aid me. I saw in your face that you had truly that intention. Are you not so powerful with the young king as they say ? Ah, surely I thought to hold his pardon in my hands to-night, written out fair and clear. I thought to have taken it home, and to have wakened him where he slept with the lion, and have shown it to him. How he would have wept for joy on my shoulder ! Oh, Sweyn, — oh, mighty, magnificent Sweyn, — how long must I wait for that ? One day would be so much gained from desperate wretchedness ! Why do you dally, — of whom they say that but to ask of the king is to obtain ? ”

Sweyn smiled slowly, fixing his strangely bright eyes upon her as he spoke. “ Tristiane, you of the wise, truthful eyes, are, after all, the simplest woman in all the world. The first silly wench from the street could answer that question of yours. You can see men’s spoken lies in their faces, but have not, it appears, the gift of divining evident truths left unuttered. Why am I slow to answer your petition, and eager to let you come here night after night to learn from my lips how your suit is advanced ? What is the fate of Magnus to me ? But your presence within my doors is more than the interests of this vast realm.”

Tristiane stared at him blankly, not understanding. “ But you are going to get Ib’s pardon for me ? ”

she faltered ; “ you are going to do as you have promised ? ”

Sweyn laughed. “ Ah, how simple you are ! how simple you are ! You are like the great pine-trees of your mountains, and the grand gray rocks, and the pure cold wind, and the deep-blue mighty element ! What an ever-renewed delight you are to me, Tristiane ! ” — the laughter passed from his face, and his eyes were intensely earnest. “ Now forget for a moment that petty coward,— not worth the breath we use to speak his name, whom out of your own generosity you would wish to save,— and listen to me a little. I am Sweyn. I have fought many battles. I have seen death close in the face, and smiled at it. My name is one that makes the enemy’s blood stand still in his chilled veins. I am a king in all but the name. There are thousands who will do my will at a sign. I can choose to-morrow a bride among the most beautiful and noblest in the land ; and yet, until I saw you, I was as lonesome as a creature of which kind only one has been placed upon the earth. I have been friends with men, and yet not of them. I have led, commanded, made use of them, been above them. And so my life has been cursed with a hidden want. But when I saw you first,— when to satisfy the young king’s freak we had gone forth on a merry masking-time,— something in me cried out at the sight, ‘ You have found your peer.’ Your frank eyes looked straight into mine, used to looking down into others’ eyes, and your soul shone out from them in its fearless, stainless altitude. A simple majesty breathed from your

quiet lineaments. I distinguished an awful beauty in them; you are so greatly, strangely beautiful, that the common herd, too dull and blind to recognize gods when they walk among them, do not even suspect your beauty! I said, before leaving you, 'She shall be Sweyn's bride,' and yet I had not resolved what my next movement towards you should be, when I learned that you had urged to see me. I wondered what you would want of me. There was something sublimely laughable in your petition,—you cannot be aware of it, being unlike any one else; I was staggered by the touch of greatness in your simplicity, that made you come and trust the cowering lamb to the generosity of a bloodthirsty lion, relying upon a bare word of his not to harm it, but to save it from the other lions. There was something unanswerable in the high reasons given by you for mercy and pardon,—something fatal to argument in your complete ignorance of mean and revengeful motives. Ah, you are not cunning like other mortals! You say exactly what is in your mind; you either have no knowledge, or else a noble disdain for sinuous courses,—and my soul bows to you, Tristiane!"

Tristiane stood like a statue, and listened to his words without averting her puzzled face, that had turned by one faint shade paler as he spoke.

"Tristiane," pursued Sweyn, more hotly, and coming nearer to her, "you shall never leave me now! You do not understand. Sweyn loves you. Sweyn has chosen you for his bride, for it is fit a lion should have a lioness for his mate. Sweyn has

despised for you all the artful, accomplished beauties of the court,— for you, grown like a perfect tree among the wind-blown hills. The proudest in the land shall bow to you, the mistress of Sweyn, who is prouder than any, and yet himself bows before you. Oh, beloved, your lashes are like a line of sunlight across the great august eyes, darkly blue and deep like the sea. In possession of you, my goddess, I am myself uplifted and made a god. I am joyous as they, transcending all human powers of gladness, since I can hold your great and gracious body in my longing arms, and call you Tristiane, *my* Tristiane, my beautiful, beloved Tristiane!"

The young warrior came toward her with outstretched arms, his eyes shining with a wonderful brilliancy, not far from the fervor of passionate tears, his firm lips trembling for once with an unspeakable, perfect tenderness.

Tristiane watched him with troubled, fascinated eyes. A sudden beautiful softness, even as a reflection from his, came into her face. She did not seem able to move; but when she felt the first slight touch of his hand, as though suddenly awaking, she cried out, "No, no, you must leave me; I must go to Ib!"

"Never again, Tristiane! You shall forget Ib. What is Ib? I hate him! He shall have his pardon, the cur, but you shall never see him again. I will teach you to forget him. We will be happier together than mortals had dreamed to be. We will live in more than human splendor,— I in the divine radiance of your face, you in the light of my tremen-

dous love that will force from you a similar love in return. Do you think you will not love me as I love you ? To-morrow, I tell you, Tristiane, you will give me throb for throb, because we were made for each other. I recognized you, marked mine, as soon as my eyes met yours. You are my own by right of the stars, of my birth, of my strength. Sweyn has always conquered ! And he holds you now, and you are his forever — But you have turned pale, — you have become so cold."

" Let me go," said Tristiane. " I am standing in the dark, — all in the dark. Only this is clear : I must go back to Ib. I have promised never to leave him. He cannot live without me. His life has been so sad ! Let me go."

" No, no," cried Sweyn, vehemently ; " I abhor the very thought of your past contact with that man. He shall never lift his base eyes upon you again. Is it not enough that he shall be pardoned for your sake ? "

" Let me go. You must let me go. He will die if I leave him ; he needs me. He has only me in all the world. I am true to him forever."

" You will forget him, I say. I will *make* you forget him. How dull you are, Tristiane, and ignorant, and cold ! Do you not know, Tristiane, that you shall love me, — that it is not possible for an immense love like mine to awaken no answering love in the beloved, — that your only home is my arms, your resting-place my heart ? "

" No, no, no !" cried Tristiane, in strenuous protest, shuddering away from him. " I do not know what

you are saying. But I am going; I am going back to Ib."

She moved to go; but he caught her, without a word, before she could reach the door.

"Stay!" he said, in a command that was still an appeal.

"I am going back to Ib."

"You shall stay!" he said fiercely, between set teeth, losing his head.

His terrible strong arms were around her; their faces were within an inch of each other; her eyes glowered sternly into his beneath her stormy, gathered brows; each could feel the other's quick, angry breath fanning his hot face.

Then began a mighty struggle. It was a contest as between two lions of equal power and courage. Without a sound from their lips, but occasionally a sharply drawn breath, they strove together for a few seconds,—she for freedom, he for mastery. Suddenly, with a cry of triumph, she broke from his arms and made a step for the door. He overtook her, and held her fast again, with a burst of hoarse laughter. She felt a deathlike sense of cold creep over her, realizing the uselessness of her efforts.

Sweyn stared for a moment in her fierce, unyielding blue eyes; then, with a sudden impulse, he flung her from him. "Go,—go back to your son of Magnus!" he cried, out of his mind with blind wrath. "I renounce you! What have I to do with a woman rigid as stone with resistance of me? I demeaned myself to strive with a woman; but you have driven me mad! Go,—go back to your shameful lover!"

he shouted, with an increase of unreasoning rage. "You would have saved him, but I tell you that you have sold him! Mark me in this: he shall be taken and put to some terrible death before your eyes! I myself will tear him limb from limb,—yes, with my own hands! Do not imagine that he shall escape justice,—or revenge call it now more properly! There is no hole on earth so small he can hide in it from me! Go,—go now, if you will!" and he dashed from the room.

Tristiane stood still, stunned. Her arms dropped at her sides. The room swam before her eyes; then all grew blank before them, and she reeled stupidly to the door.

She knew not how she reached the open air, but suddenly she found the stars above her head. The keen, cold wind restored her to her senses, that had seemed failing. With laboring heart and trembling feet she hurried on in the direction of Triflor's booth. Everything was hopelessly confused in her mind. She seemed walking in utter darkness. Only this was clear to her: that she must hurry—hurry—and take Ib away somewhere and hide him. As the thought of his danger pressed harder upon her, she started to run. An occasional drunken song met her ear. Once or twice she missed the way, and had to retrace her steps. The night made everything look unfamiliar.

It seemed to her she had been wandering about the city for many hours, when she finally reached what she thought to be the street she was looking for. Yes, she remembered it. The booth was at the

other end. She hurried as much as was possible in the almost utter darkness ; for the torch placed in an iron ring at the corner had burned itself out, and the starlight was dim. Now she stood on familiar ground. There was the booth. All might yet be well.

She felt her hair rise on her head with a sudden mortal fear as she entered the enclosure ; for in advancing she stumbled over disorderly masses lying about the ground. Then she became aware of the stars above her head peeping in through the broken roof.

“ Ib ! Ib ! ” she cried out, and began groping madly about among broken, ruined things. Suddenly her hand met something soft and warm,— the lion. Ib, then, must be near.

He lay by the lion, quite still. She shook him and called to him.

He drew a long sigh. “ Tristiane ? ” he asked faintly, as though awaking from a deep slumber.

Tristiane fell on her knees beside him. “ What has happened, Ib ? ”

“ Ah, is it you ? Thank God it is you ! ”

“ What is it, Ib ? What has happened ? ”

“ What know I ? ” he said feebly. “ A brawl,— a drunken mob. They set out to tear down the place,— for fun. All fled. I was afraid to go at first, and then something fell across my legs and I could not, because I was so faint. It is there now, and holds me down. Can you lift it ? ”

She lifted the beam ; he crawled from under it.

“ Can you stand, Ib ? ” she asked. “ Can you walk ? Oh, Ib ! ” she cried out, in a voice of most

piercing anguish, “we are in danger! We must fly — to-night — this minute; and I have brought this upon you! Oh, do not ask me; I cannot tell you! For the sake of pity, do not ask me! Only this: we must fly! Whither, I do not know,—only away from this city, filled with our enemies. Come, come, Ib!”

But Ib had sunk again to the ground. “I am hurt, Tristiane. I cannot walk. We cannot fly. No matter, Tristiane; I have long expected it. Don’t be so distressed. I was lying in a stupor a little while ago, that seemed like death, and it was such peace as I have never known. I think I could lie still here to-night and let them come that seek me, and kill me if they would, and call it a relief. A beautiful, grand denial of all the past it would be,—would it not, Tristiane? — to meet my death like a man in the end, after having shunned it so long, like a hunted hare.” And then, in a whisper, “Are they looking for me?”

And through an exquisite sympathy Tristiane could feel the fever of fear that had come back upon him in spite of his courageous words. She did not answer.

“Are they looking for me?” he asked again.

“Oh, Ib, I will save you yet!” she cried out; “I will save you yet!” There was not a moment to be lost. She stooped and gathered him in her arms,—a light weight, scarcely more than a child’s, he was so wasted away with sorrow and pain and fear. With a sigh of relief, he let his head drop on her shoulder; he felt so safe in those strong, kind arms.

She stood still a moment, hesitating. Where should she go? Then, as a sudden light, came back to her mind the thought of Knut and his boat, that was to sail as soon as the coronation feasts were over, the last day of which was about to dawn. Knut, for the sake of Kabiorg's sweet eyes, had been a frequent visitor at the booth; and Tristiane, scarcely listening, had heard long accounts of his boat, anchored at the mouth of the river. In a rapid whisper she told Ib of it. They could not venture to follow the fertile, populous river road, but must travel to their destination over unfrequented downs along the desolate sea-coast.

"You know the ways; direct me," said Tristiane. She moved to the door, and came again under the open sky. "The lion!" said Ib, sorrowfully. Without a word she turned back. The lion was standing straining his chain after Ib. She unfastened him and led him along. The three went forth into the darkness.

At daybreak the city was far behind them. They had reached unimpeded the verge of the sea. When the light made things distinct, Tristiane, who from the first dim glimmer of dawn had been glancing anxiously behind her, to make sure they were not followed, stopped and let Ib softly on the ground. They dared not travel in the daylight on the exposed bare highland; one least mischance would be fatal, Tristiane felt, and she would not risk it. In a little hollow, veiled by a few ragged bushes, they lay all day,—Ib, with heroic forbearance, refraining from questions concerning their flight; for which her eyes rendered him grateful praise.

When the darkness had come on again, Tristiane arose and resumed her burden. Ib seemed heavier than before, for she was faint with hunger and consuming agitation. She had not dared to beg for bread; they must vanish from the land like shadows, leaving no trace of their passage. Ib, exhausted, slept fitfully in her arms. She plodded on and on, unwearied and watchful. Now and then, at some least unaccountable sound, she felt a tremor pass over his body, and her heart beat wildly against her breast for pity.

“Oh, be not afraid, Ib! I am with you. I am strong. Indeed I will save you. No one can reach you but through me.”

Over the desolate downs they went by the faint light of stars. She carried him tenderly as a mother might, having a care of his hurt limb. A little late moon gave them its light for a few hours. Tristiane set her face to the wind, and progressed rapidly, in the direction of the river mouth. Occasionally, for a minute, she felt the numbness of extreme fatigue creep over her, and her foot dragged; but there arose in her mind the memory of Sweyn's infurate face and threatening words, and she went along more rapidly than ever, with quickening breath, a grim determination in her face that frowned darkly on the darkness. Glows of painful heat swept through her frame at the ghastly image of what must follow their being overtaken. But no; she would save Ib,—Ib, whom she had betrayed! And at the thought of her fond treachery,—alas! how she had striven to do the very best for him!—a

great yearning to make compensation to him made her cry out again: "I will never leave you, Ib. I am your slave. I will watch over you every hour. I will be with you until death. Oh, have you not told me of a beautiful storied place where there are more flowers than here, and the air is balmy, and the sun shines in a sky continually serene and more deeply blue than ours? Have you not, Ib? We will go there; we will travel, travel, travel until we reach it. The boat will take us as far, perhaps. We will not rest until we have touched that shore. I will carry you so in my untiring arms. Then, when we are once there, we will lie down on the soft grass and listen to the birds without speaking. We will remember the past only as a troubled dream. Oh, Ib, Ib! say that it shall be so! Say that you can still be happy!"

Ib looked at her long with his grateful eyes. The dream was too beautiful.

"Among those people that speak another language we shall be alone as in an enchanted place. Tristiane will have to be your world at first, as well as your servant. I will strive to be enough, indeed, Ib. I will heap up pleasant leaves for you to sleep on. All that shall be when we have reached the boat,—if we can just reach the boat! We shall see this shore fade away like smoke. We will say good-by forever to this old home, and begin life all over again, turning our eyes to a new and fairer, that will hold great peace for us two, poor pilgrims!"

She felt a tear from Ib's eyes fall upon her neck.

A strange flood of tears blinded her own eyes,—the first she had ever wept.

“Oh, Ib,” she cried out in great torment, “forgive me! forgive me! No! spare me,—do not ask me for what. Hush!”

She stopped short, and dropped to the ground.

A noise of horses’ feet. A group of horsemen came in sight, their bright torches flaring in the wind, and shedding about them a strong bloody light. They stood still not far from the place where the three had cowered down in the shadow of a stunted tree. They seemed to consult together for a minute. They held their torches high aloft to light the downs, and gazed anxiously about. Tristiane held her breath, choked by her heart. Then they galloped on, and were soon lost to sight behind the unevenness of the ground.

Tristiane arose and took up Ib, and moved onward again, walking with set teeth. The strain was beginning to tell upon her. Her even breath was drawn deep and hard. Ib, weak and sick, slept. She knew not what thanks to make for that unexpected blessing of sleep that had fallen upon him. He was saved the agony of uncertainty that racked her as they went, went, went along the high cliff overhanging the sounding sea. They must be nearing the mouth of the river now. In a little they should be safe. An anticipated exultation curved her lips.

Suddenly she heard again the trampling of hoofs. She bowed down over the earth, shielding Ib with her body. Another troop of horsemen rode by, hold-

ing high their torches. They were evidently in search of some fugitive. An overpowering feeling of intensest hatred made Tristiane grind her teeth. How he had kept his word! how cruel to the core he was! with what joy he would do all he had threatened, and more! how he would hound them to death with his bloodhounds, and laugh when he had them at bay! with what keen vindictiveness he would relish her horrible pain, in the slow, hard death he would inflict on the shrinking body of Ib!

She put her arms protectingly around him, and all the fierceness of a lioness aroused in defence of her young fired her blood. By all that was holy in heaven and on earth, he should be baffled yet! She arose again, and went on along the unresting sea, dragging the tired lion.

A feeling of despair, the first yet known, came over her when another troop of horsemen rode by. She bit the ground for rage and sorrow as she lay on it waiting for them to get out of sight. The enforced delay might be fatal; already the sky was paling.

When they had passed, she went on stolidly: she *would* save him! But a feeling of cold was in her heart on account of the thousand ghastly suspicions that dimly crowded about her brain, and that she had not the courage to face and consider. Ib was heavy as lead; a dull stupor had come over him from pain and weariness; his head hung helplessly on her arm. All at once, the whole weight of the truth coming upon her, she halted. Of course they would be taken. His people — for

they must be his people — would lie in wait at all the ways. They should be cut off from the port, and driven to the sea. With the courage of desperation she shook herself free from the fear that was about to paralyze her, and walked on bravely, for the sake of one possible chance of safety, — for she must do something.

The stars went out one by one ; the dread dawn came on relentlessly ; slowly it whitened in the east.

They must be quite near the river now. The boat, no doubt, would leave on the high tide ; the tide, she judged, was about half in. On the high cliff, against a palely roseate sky, appeared the great form of the woman, burdened with the wounded man, leading the lion.

Suddenly, far ahead, her keen eye caught sight of men on horseback standing still. She shaded her eyes and gazed fixedly at them. Yes, his men ! He had done his worst ; he had cut off the way to the ship. Then she looked behind, and thought to perceive more men coming on from there. Then, suddenly, in the far distance at her right hand she caught the movement of many vague shapes. So it had all been in vain, — the long march, the almost unendurable strain, the trembling hope ! Fool, to have thought to escape *him* ! Had he not warned her ? “ Sweyn was never conquered ; Sweyn never sues ; Sweyn seizes his own.” So they were in Sweyn’s hands at last !

She turned her face to the sea. There was no place to hide now from the broadening day. She

laid Ib on the ground, and sat down beside him, with his head on her lap. The doting old lion crouched by him, and licked his hand, very feebly, once or twice. Tristiane watched the sky slowly deepening in color where the sun was going to rise. All was over now,—they had only to wait. Her eyes, falling on Ib's face, filled again with those unfamiliar human tears. As it lay, turned to the dawn, the soft light seemed to alter and ennable it; the large, intelligent brow wore a look of almost seraphic beauty; the weak mouth showed only an excessive tenderness in its pale lines; the hollow eyes were filled with peace; the wind that blew in his soft thin hair, pure white now at the temples, made it look like rays of light. A great hot tear from Tristiane's eyes fell upon his cheek. His eyes opened, and looked up into the gloom of hers. "Ah, we are resting," he said vaguely. "It is good to rest,—good to rest."

His eyelids, weighed down with somnolence, opened and closed again a few times, then finally opened wide, and were fixed upon her with infinite love. "I have been dreaming beautiful things. I had forgotten what we were about. Are we nearly there, Tristiane? But no, I do not care. I feel like a little child again. I am quite, quite safe wherever you are. You said once, 'Rest upon me.' You see I have, Tristiane. You are so strong,—so great and strong."

Not strong nor great then as she sat looking away from him, far out to sea, forcing back the stream of her tears to its burning bed. Her dust-tarnished, dew-drenched head had a dreary, disordered look.

The old godlike calm of her face had given place to an expression of simple suffering humanity.

“Tristiane,” said Ib, finally, after a long pause, “I have thought just lately that maybe my life was not made all wrong for me, after all. I call back my curses against fate. Maybe it was best for me that I should be hurled off my high pedestal of self-righteousness, and, finding myself in reality so much less than the stature of a man, should strive to gain a manly height. Surely striving, whether a man succeed or not, will count for something in the end. I think that as I am now—I think—I hope—and yet cannot altogether trust myself—if I were put back where I stood when I for the first time discovered myself wanting, I could stand up and pay willingly the penalty of a crime.” They both gazed silently at the sky for a while. “And then I have you,” he went on. “Without all that pain and horror I should not have had you, Tristiane. I think you have made up for it all. It was worth such suffering to find such pity under the skies. I think perhaps for you I would live it all over again,—the pain, the horror, and—yes, the crime.” And with more love and gratitude in his face than could ever be conveyed by words, he said softly, “How shall I ever thank you, Tristiane! Oh, my patient, compassionate Tristiane!”

His eyelids dropped; he dozed again before Tristiane, who was searching her mind for some little word to say, could speak at all. Thank Heaven that he slept!

She turned and looked around. The party from

the right had come nearer. She could now distinguish the mounted men one from another. The light was so bright they must be able to see her now, and Ib, and the lion. Yes, evidently they had been spied. The men came on quite rapidly over the uneven, difficult ground. One great horseman led the rest. She knew him even from so far away. He threw his bridle to the wind, and advanced at headlong speed. Turning again to the sea, she saw a little ship flying over the dark waves with full white sails, — the same, no doubt, in which they were to have escaped.

And now the great rider was within hearing. She could not bear to turn and see him advancing with his conquering mien, — to watch the massive outline growing more distinct, and the terrible revengeful face, and the unfaltering eye.

How sweetly Ib slept! Suddenly she stretched her hand to his throat. One slight effort of the strong, merciful hand, and he need not fear Sweyn, — not pain, not death, ever any more. One effort of that hand and — But no, she could not do it.

No, there was nothing to do, — nothing.

With her last strength she rose to her feet and confronted the rider; then the sense of the approaching danger and death for her sleeping friend overpowered her. She threw up her arms and sank down beside him, vanquished, and buried her blanching face in her knees; for there was nothing to do, — nothing. The steel might pass through her body first, but Ib would be reached in the end, even as Sweyn had said. No, there was no hole so small on

the face of the earth they might in it have hidden from him.

A voice like a clarion rang through the misty morning air, "Magnus, son of Magnus! Magnus, son of Magnus!"

Tristiane felt Ib tremble violently. She looked up. Ib was half raised on his knees, staring with starting eyes at the rider, now quite near. His face was ashen and quivering.

The great voice rang out again, clear and sonorous: "Magnus, son of Magnus! The ban against thee is called in. Thou art pardoned of king and country. Thy goods are restored to thee. Thy rank is thine own again. Praise to the king who sees that mercy is good!"

Ib stared at him, still quivering. Then slowly a great smile irradiated his face, at the same time glorified by the newly risen sun. He stretched his hands out uncertainly, and groped in the air a moment, and fell backward on the ground with a sigh, his face smiling vaguely up at the suddenly illuminated sky,—the face of one who has died of a joy too great.

And Tristiane, and Sweyn, who had arrived on the spot and leaped from his saddle, stood gazing at each other over the frail, miserable, liberated body with the joy-lit face. Her eyes were ringed with shadows dark and sad like death. His, too, were sleepless and feverishly bright, staring from a haggard face. All the world lay steeped in the sweet red color of the new day. They gazed, gazed without words, till Sweyn cried out, in a voice harsh and broken

with emotion: "Oh, why did you think the very worst of me? Why did you believe all that I said? I have been seeking you all over the land ever since."

And across the broken barriers of hatred and injustice, Tristiane, her face full of unutterable prayers, held out her hand to him.

SYLVANUS.



SYLVANUS.

THREE was a rich merchant who lived very comfortably and happily with his excellent lady until their only child died.

The poor little thing had come so late and gone so soon. It had been so pretty and promising ; it could already creep about the floor and babble ; it danced in the nurse's arms as soon as ever a well-known face appeared in the doorway ; then suddenly, in a few hours, all that was changed, — there was just a pale little body to put away quickly and plant a white rosebush over.

“These are evil days,” thought the merchant, bowed over his ledgers in his counting-house ; “but they will pass too.” He was a fat, rosy man, fond of ease and money and his wife. He had been fond also of little Otto ; but it seemed to him that as sorrow made one miserable and did no one any good, one's clearest duty was to put it away and forget it. He could, perhaps, have done so, but his wife would not let him. Her eyes were always red ; she never smiled ; she seldom spoke. In the middle of the night he was awakened by her crying. When he looked up from his emptied dish, he saw that she could not eat. And this month after month.

At last he considered that he was quite worn out, and must take a holiday, — must contrive to breathe for a time some other atmosphere than this doleful one of his own house. He judged that his absence would be a grateful relief to his lady, who not only would not permit him to console her, but looked resentfully, it appeared to him, upon his good appetite and sound slumbers.

He set his affairs in such order that his business could be carried on for a while without his attendance, embraced his wife, and started off on a journey with a couple of good friends he had.

At the end of three months he returned. He blew his whistle lustily as he came clattering down the street. He had brought curious gifts to his wife, beside a fresh lease of health gained in the sunny foreign land.

His wife, sad and listless as when he left her, came out on to the doorstep to greet him.

“ Hold out your arms carefully, wife,” he said to her; and from under his cloak he dropped something into them, — something dark and warm and soft.

“ What is it ? ” she cried out in alarm. “ Is it a cub ? ” for it was after sundown, and everything dim and gray. “ Is it a little wolf ? ”

The merchant laughed, leaped off his horse, — no, he did not really leap, but let himself prudently down, and they went into the house.

The wife hurried to the light. The man followed, and sat down by her, enjoying her astonishment.

The brown thing slept. It smelt good, of dead leaves.

It was a little child, after all. But what a strange little child! Not like any other she had seen. Firstly, it was so brown; then it had such ears,—long and pointed, as one could see if one pushed back the coal-black locks that fell over them. Its face was not pretty, like her baby's; it did not look like a baby even; yet she could not help bending over and kissing it. It opened its eyes,—very large and dark and soft those were,—looked stupidly ahead for a second, then curled up closer, rather like a tiny bear than a child, gave a warm sigh, and slept on. She gathered it hungrily against her bosom, forgetting to ask who was its mother, and if she might not be missing it.

Then her husband told her his story. In tracking the boar, on a jolly hunting-expedition, he and one of his friends had got separated from the rest of the company, and had come to a spot in the very heart of the hills which looked to them as if never human foot had trodden it before. There it was dim and cool, and quite silent but for the noise of streams and the fowls of the air. No woodman's axe had ever gleamed among the trees; they were gigantically high, and their trunks were covered with thick moss, moss and long vines hung down from their limbs; their roots were great and gnarled, and swelled up under the fallen leaves of many autumns. Under a rock among the tall ferns, in a den lined with leaves, the huntsmen had found five little brown things huddled together, all sleeping. They had marvelled on discovering what strange cubs they were, and had stolen one to bring home to her for a pet.

The wife leaned back, holding it close and rocking it. When she closed her eyes it felt so dearly warm and sweet and natural in the place that had been so long empty. She did not think once of trying to return the little creature to its own mother, who may have wanted it, even though she had other four. She laid it to sleep that night in the curve of her arm against her side; every time she woke she caressed it.

They called it Sylvanus because it was from the woods.

To the merchant's mind came drifting back stories, read years before and almost forgotten, of a race of wild forest people, supposed to have lived in that land he had visited, in the days of long vanished gods; a race of beings who had like this child long ears and little horns budding on their foreheads among the rough locks.

The merchant never thought long of anything that was puzzling, unless indeed it were connected with money-making; his wife was pleased with her little monster; a measure of peace and contentment had come back into his home, which allowed him to eat his fat capons and take a nap afterward with an easy heart: that was enough for his adventure among the hills to be accounted altogether good.

Far beyond the rich city that crowded to the edges of the river, arose a line of thickly wooded hills. These looked blue,—blue and very far away. They turned violet at evening, then gray; one could scarcely believe that they were really clothed with

thick green waving trees. Probably, even if Otto's mother had insisted that the attempt should be made, the sylvan child could not have been put back in his nest among the ferns ; the huntsmen could not easily have found again that primeval place so lost among the hills, — if one there had been willing to take the long journey and try.

The merchant's house stood in the most populous part of the city, on the very edge of the river. The slow dark water washed its walls, and showed by a green line how high it could sometimes rise. There were steps leading down to it. Up these came the bargemen bringing bales of merchandise from the boats below, — bales that had a fine flavor of the East. For our merchant was a great man in his way, and dealt in rich stuffs from all parts of the world, precious spices too, genis, and even birds. In his vaulted ware-chambers one saw brocades and beads and flower-bulbs and pink-crested cockatoos ; one smelt sandalwood and cocoa-nuts. His own prosperous face was often seen among his clerks ; sometimes he himself bent over the counter praising and measuring off stiff gold cloth to a lady of quality ; but oftenest he was to be found at his desk over his swelling accounts, which indeed gave him enough to do.

When Sylvanus could walk by himself, he came down into the warerooms too, and wished to play at hide-and-seek among the rolls of silk and velvet. But he was ordered out at once : he was such a troublesome fellow ; he got into such unexpected mischief, and had an unpleasant habit of biting the

hands that attempted to prevent or restrain him. That he did it with laughter and not in anger did not make it less disagreeable to the young clerks, ruefully examining the prints of his sharp small teeth on their fingers and thumbs.

The only one who heartily loved him, who truly enjoyed his society, was the merchant's wife, Hildgart. She could scarcely endure that he should leave her sight. She thought him even beautiful and sweet. She gave him all her own little child's things to play with. She clothed him as richly as if he had been a nobleman's son. She took him with her wherever she went, holding his strong little brown hand lovingly in her plump white one. She rejoiced to see how straight and vigorous he was, and, even though it frightened her somewhat, how in his rough play he could crush and break and destroy.

Sometimes when the wind was singing boisterously among the gables, unaccountably he would be seized with a wild spirit of gayety; nothing could hold him then; he must dance and sing his mad inarticulate songs, roll on the ground, laugh and leap and shout, until he was quite, quite tired out.

Hildgart on such occasions stood helplessly by. She had not strength to seize him and keep him quiet, though he was but a few years old; and in those moments he seemed not to understand anything she said to him. So, when his elfish humor and the bewildering din he made had thoroughly alarmed and annoyed her, she could but sit down and cry. Tears of hers always brought the child back to her side, soothed as if by charm. He rubbed his black head

against her arm, and pushed his face up to hers until she had forgiven him.

She was not long learning her power over him, and then these accesses of uncontrolled animal spirits became more and more rare. The wind might hum among the chimneys ; only a dancing, restless light came into Sylvanus's bronze-brown eyes. He turned them speculatively upon his foster-mother ; seemed to hesitate, reflect, and remember ; then the restless light went out of his eyes, because he lowered the lids over them ; and he sat stone-still, getting paler and paler with effort, as he listened to the wind shouting out its mad suggestions.

So Hildgart contrived at last to make quite a decent little boy of him,—a little boy, except in appearance, almost like other little boys. He spoke politely, and did not tear his clothes more than others of his age. He was obliging ; he never cried. He even learned lessons, though that was a slow and sorely trying experience.

But as Hildgart was able with a better conscience to boast of his improvement to Lothrich, her husband, to call him honestly an obedient, dutiful child, his splendid strength, which had been her pride, seemed to wane. As he grew older, too, and gentler, he fell into a habit of moping.

Lothrich, finding him with his dispirited head buried on his knees, would shake him roughly, and say, “What is the matter, lad ?” “Nothing,” Sylvanus answered. “Of what are you thinking ?” “Of nothing !” which always made Lothrich as indignant as he was capable of getting. He would

have wished to beat the stupid boy, but did not dare, because his wife was so insane as to have a regard for him. Yet nothing was the matter that Sylvanus knew; and he said truly that he was thinking of nothing.

And now when his mother's tyrannical tenderness would leave him a little leisure, a little time to be spent out of the reach of her idolatrous eyes, he would wander through the house from attic to cellar. He would stand, a strange, melancholy little figure, in a crimson velvet coat stitched with gold flowers, and stare for long minutes through the leaded panes that let in the daylight so tempered it seemed to come through a thick sheet of water; if the window were open, he would lean out over the river, listlessly watching the crowding boats, the motley crowd, the black water. But it was not what he wanted. He drew back, and let his eyes roam over the rich silver things on the dresser, and the painted plates, and the carved wood. He went up into the garret, and looked out over the city,—roofs, steeples, smoke, pigeons. He went down among the clerks and wares; saw the busy looks, the shining money. Lothrich, catching sight of him, shouted, "What do you want?" "Nothing," replied Sylvanus at once, and withdrew. And it was true; he did not want anything, or rather, he did not know what it was he wanted. But he went up and down the dark, ancient burgher's dwelling as if it had been a cage, and he a bird seeking some way to get out from it,—only that he sought for nothing. He did not care to get out into the narrow streets; he went there often enough with

Hildgart. They were no better to him than the interior of the house.

Once, spurred by his unrest, he got on to the roof and climbed to the very top of the chimney.

Then he saw, stretching beyond the commercial city huddled greedily on the banks of the murky river, the green, green country, and far away the blue hills. A breath came straight from them to him that lifted the hair backward away from his pointed ears and budding horns ; and with his curving nostrils expanded in a sort of frenzy to seize all the balmy meaning of the breeze, with his kindling eyes wide in fascinated wonder, he did not look any more like the respectable citizen's son his garb would denote him to be, but like just what he was.

More and more thirstily still he gazed and drank in the wind ; and the clouds sailed over his head, and the sunshine poured down upon him, and he saw slow sweet changes come over the dreaming hills.

Then he heard Hildgart's frightened, anguished voice calling him from below. And he descended, and was properly scolded and wept over, and forbidden ever to do such a thing again ; and he never did, because it gave that loving woman pain.

But Hildgart's trials with her foster-child were not yet at an end. Soon after that he was missing ; he had run away. When, after a few hours, he was brought home, he seemed unable to explain. He was dull and dejected ; not even his foster-mother's shrill reproofs, mingled with hysterical rejoicing at his res-

toration, served to rouse him. Moved with a tender dread, Hildgart would have him by her side at every hour of the weeks that followed; but he eluded her vigilance once again, and one fine late summer evening was nowhere to be found.

When all search for him had proved vain, when three long days and sleepless nights had not brought him, Hildgart, who did love him as if he had been her very own, fell ill, and lay on her bed quite distractred, moaning for Sylvanus.

They had given her a potion, and she had become quiet at last; the woman who attended her had shaded the light and fallen asleep in her big chair. Hildgart lay turned toward the open window, beyond which was night. She did not know if she were awake or dreaming, when she saw a face peering into the room,—the face that of all the world she wanted most to see. She held her arms out noiselessly, afraid to startle it. Then it vanished, and she thought it had been a dream, and her tears fell in heavy drops on to her pillow.

Behold! the face again, still nearer. Was it really Sylvanus's face, though?

She half rose and held out her hands as before, in dumb invitation. The dream, if it were one, shook its head roguishly; she saw then that the altered outline was due to a fantastic head-gear. It withdrew; but after a moment she saw, or dreamed she saw, it far outside dancing in one long moonbeam that dropped suddenly from a cleft in the clouds. The moonbeam faded away, and the little dancing figure was lost.

Hildgart's heart ached within her, and her sobbing must be heard even out in the hushed night. Had it been heard? The face was again at the window, peering in with a curiously saddened expression. Hildgart this time made no luring gesture; but the faint, heart-broken sound of her weeping fell shuddering on the heart of the night. And presently the figure she had seen leaping so joyously in the slanting silvery light was at her side; a cool cheek was crushed against her own.

But how altered, how altered was her boy! He looked so suddenly grown strong and beautiful, she could scarcely think he was the same. His face was flushed with the sun. His eyes, that under the strange, sharply upward-tending brows shone ever with the color of a sunlit woodland stream flowing without ripple over a bed of brown leaves, had doubled their lustre and light. His full, upward-curving lips, that some undefined ailing had before dried and paled, were like soft glossy satin, stained with a vivid crimson fruit; his sharp teeth flashed white between them; his breath came as a southern breeze that has blown through the vineyards in bloom. His wild hair, thick and strong as a black sheep's fleece, had leaves in it, and tendrils mixed with clusters of grapes, and little pine-cones gleaming with resin,—a mad wreath, falling off over one ear. He had lost most of his garments; his shoulders were bare and brown, and cold with dew. He brought in with him the balmy freshness of the open night, a vivifying odor of pine and earth, of hay and rich roses.

Hildgart clasped her arms tightly around him. "Oh, my bad, bad darling, you have broken my heart!"

He struggled a second, and drew back as far as her hand closed about his own would allow him, looking at her ruefully. "Ah," he said, "I remembered that, and that is why I came." And as her tears flowed more stormily than before, he came nearer again and sat on the edge of the bed, glancing softly at her from under his dewy, disordered locks. "Don't cry," he said, "dearest one, dearest! I will not go away again." And he lifted his hands to his hair, and in silent passion tore from its tangles the fragrant leaves and fruits, and let them drop on to the floor.

Then his mother, quite comforted, must make him relate all he had done in those days. And the old woman, who had awakened, heard, too, with deep wonder.

"It was evening," he said, while the golden light that had ebbed from his great eyes when he displaced his woodland crown began glowing again as a coal under a steady breath; "I ran,—I ran until the streets were far behind me; then I stopped to breathe. Oh, mother, mother, what the wind is like out yonder! It came over seas of yellow light and leagues of red and violet clouds, across endless fields of fresh green grass, through thousands of trees. It called out, 'Dance! dance!' I was not my old self any more, but had a new life. The blood rushed like wind through my veins; it swelled my heart like a sail. I was lighter than a leaf,—I danced. I tore up the

grass, and threw it in the air with clumps of sweet, cold earth. How good it smells,—the earth! Then I stretched upon the ground, and laid my ear to it, and heard things grow. Oh, a subdued, immense, unceasing rustle, like a great, gentle breathing! I ran on and on, dancing. There was a stream; tall reeds grew on its edges; the wind passed through them, and they sang,—they sang! Broad flowers floated on the stream, so pale in the moonlight. I leaped in the water. I felt it rush deliciously all through my hair, and close over me. I caught at the long, smooth stems of the lilies, and dragged them up,—dripping sheaves of them. I frolicked among the reeds; dear small, cool green things, with eyes like jewels, lighted on my shoulders,—they were not afraid of me. Ah, I spent a happy night."

Hildgart gazed stupidly at his excited eyes. The attendant shrugged her shoulders, and thought, "He is crazy; he delights in frogs!"

"And I came to fertile fields," said Sylvanus, "and vineyards. The branches of the vines were weighed down with fruits,—some purple and some green. I tore them from the stems. I crushed them and drank. My head swam. A sad-souled, patient bird was singing; its notes fell through the silvery night like drops of dew. I slept, and dreamed a wonderful, wonderful dream—"

"And then?" questioned Hildgart, for he had stopped, and was looking far away, beyond the walls of the house, farther than those of the city.

"Then I came out of a grove to the edge of a pasture. There was feeding a herd of beautiful quiet

animals. A graybeard sat under a tree and played on a reed. I listened. The music seemed to speak ; it said a thousand new things, that however as soon as I heard them I seemed to have always known. I lay in the grass, and scarcely breathed. I crept nearer and nearer. Then the herdsman looked around suddenly, and saw me lifting my head above the tall grasses to hear better. He dropped his instrument and fled. I leaped up and rushed among the beautiful beasts. They plunged and ran ; their great eyes rolled. I sprang on to the back of one ; I seized his shining horns, and we galloped swiftly over the plain. Then I left him and sprang on to another. Clots of earth were dashed up from his hoofs, we tore so stormily over the ground. And the herd, all lifting their mighty deep voices, thundered by our side. The earth trembled beneath us. When I excited the brave, panting creatures with my voice, they lashed their silken flanks with their tasselled tails. That was sport ! When I had played enough, I went into the grove again and rested among the ferns. Then, as I was half asleep, the wind blew through the tree-tops ; it came from the hills,— those blue hills one can see from our chimney. It called out, ‘ Come away into the hills ! Come away into the hills ! ’ I rose and was following,— oh, mother, how beautiful it must be out there ! — when I thought of you.”

“ Sylvanus, Sylvanus, how could you be so cruel as to leave me ? ” complained Hildgart ; “ you have made me so ill and unhappy. I see that you are a wild, heartless boy with evil instincts. You will come to no good. My affection is wasted on you.”

Sylvanus looked exceedingly patient and sorrowful then. He lowered his head, while his eyes filled with tears of shame and remorse.

“What could I do more for you than I do?” queried Hildgart, still reproachful. “I love you from the deepest of my heart; I care for you most tenderly; I seek your good in all things. Are you not clad and fed daintily? And when we die will not all we possess become yours? You will be powerful and honored. You will have this goodly house, and heavy silver, and fine linen.”

Sylvanus, as she spoke, was looking at her intently, as she at him. He could not understand her any better than she could him. His unformed thought was, “Silver and fine linen, indeed!” And that of the old woman, who was again falling asleep in her chair, “Water-lilies, forsooth! Smell of the earth,—bah!”

Years passed, and Sylvanus grew at Hildgart’s side. He was now quite a tall lad, and had a suitable demeanor. He had been instructed in polite manners and learning among other wealthy burghers’ sons, and had gained even a measure of the merchant’s good-will by becoming like other people.

“As the lad is no discredit to us,” the merchant came at last to saying, almost reconciled with himself after years of dumb rage at his unpardonable blunder in meddling with the woodland family, “and we have no children of our own, he shall some day inherit of us; for my wife has set her heart upon it.”

But it was not destined that Sylvanus should be an heir. There now came upon the vast scene of the world a new actor,—a tiny, fair-haired child, a brother to that little Otto over whom the rosebush had grown luxuriant.

Sylvanus saw it sleeping on Hildgart's fair bosom. He saw her face bend over it, so beautiful and softened as never before; a wild, trembling pain shot through his heart.

It was the dear, fair face that had accompanied him all through his life: he had seen it on awaking, he had seen it in falling asleep; it had had brooding, loving glances for him alone. And now it appeared to him more lovely than ever: the eyes looked bluer and sweeter from its having grown so pale; the flaxen hair he was used to see neatly braided and fastened fell loosely all about it and upon the pillows. And she was not thinking of him; she was drifting away, away from him, on her love for the little new-comer,—the baby white and soft like herself, and like the long-ago, the unforget-
gotten child Otto.

Sylvanus felt how he was too big now to nestle up to her as he had used to do; but he crept near, and laid his rough head against her arm. Then, as she was scarcely aware of him at first, he laid his hand on the baby under her eyes; but his hand looked so brown, so darkly brown and sinewy, that he drew it back quickly, almost frightened.

“Is not he a pretty child?” said Hildgart. “See how fat and white his little dimpled fists are!”

Sylvanus fled from her presence and into the

street. He wandered haphazard for several hours. He chanced upon a crowd; there floated to him, over the heads of men and women, the sound of a musical instrument. He stopped to listen, too, to the street-singer.

“Oh, ho!” sang the street-singer, “the joyous life in the woodland hills! There live Pan and his strong faun-sons; there live the dryads and the light-footed oreades. These twist long leaves in the coils of their sweet-smelling hair, and dance with the brown fauns; while Pan sits on a mossy rock and pipes to them a lay, never twice the same. He pipes on a green reed, and the curious deer come tripping over the rustling leaves; and the spotted hinds, the light little fawns draw near to listen, with one glistening black hoof lifted from the ground. The wild beasts come too, made harmless as the deer are fearless, because the music has charmed them. They lie in circle, with their heavy muzzles resting on their paws, and their tawny eyes fixed upon the god. And the fauns and dryads dance. Oh, ho!” sang the street-singer, “the free life in the woodland hills!”

And on and on he sang to the staring city-folk of the deep-breathing wind in mid-forest, of the hidden crystal fountains, of the joyous chase, the spotted skins hung over a young faun’s shoulders, the chestnuts bursting from their burrs.

He moved on. The crowd followed him awhile as he went singing down the street, but soon grew thinner and melted away. The sun had set, the air was becoming chill, the good citizens must be about their business.

Sylvanus followed still; his heart was throbbing as once of old. He caught up with the singer,—a slender, agreeable, hungry-looking young mortal, with flowing locks, a tattered cloak that hung down to the dust, and a bunch of ribbons fastened on to the stringed instrument he carried by a strap over his shoulder. He had ceased singing, and was walking along with his head thrown back, staring up at a melting sunset cloud.

“Sing more!” pleaded Sylvanus, laying his hand on the bard’s shabby sleeve,—“more, more about the woods and the wind!”

The bard stopped and looked at Sylvanus. The light was becoming uncertain, but he could still distinguish the citizen’s rich garb, the silver clasps on his mantle, the plume in his cap; he could see his strange, dark face. He broke out laughing, and said: “You are a faun yourself, are n’t you? You have only to show me the pointed ears for me to be able to affirm that here, in a civilized country, in this late century, — so long since the old gods passed away! — I saw one evening (and not on a door-knocker either, nor a gargoyle, but in a crimson cloth suit right prettily slashed) a faun,— a real, sunburned, belated child of Pan!”

In this wise was first hinted to Sylvanus the secret of his birth.

“Yes, I think you may be a faun,” said Hildgart; “though I had thought they were a pure invention of the poets. I have said so many times that you are a child of gypsies, found on our doorstep on a

day after that dark, wandering people had been seen passing through the city, that I truly believe it, except I stop to think. But the truth is you were brought from the deep woods, Sylvanus, where Lothrich found you in a cave at the foot of a tree. That day I had noticed the reflection of my face in the mirror, how ill I looked and likely to die, and I had been pleased at the thought. But when you came I cared to live, for I loved you like my own flesh and blood. And I have been a good mother to you ; and it has been much better for you than the woods, where everything is wild. Yes, I have loved you dearly. Still, I am glad to have a child of my own too. One loves that like nothing else ; and when it is passionate and sullen,—as you sometimes are, dear, though on the whole such a dutiful child,—one forgives it more easily, because one is obliged to think perhaps it inherits its defects from one's self. But I don't imagine this child will be anything but gentle and sweet,—do you ? Look at it now ! ” And she kissed it adoringly. “ Why are you so troubled ? If it is Lothrich and his manner to you lately, you need not care for that, dear child. He is jealous for Otto. He is afraid that my affection for you will make me unjust to our own son. But as long as I am here to uphold your rights, you need not fear but he will treat you as he should. Many a struggle have we had already on your account ; but I have always prevailed, and shall still have my way. You are my son, too, after all, and will be a good elder brother to this little one. Dear me ! it will be so delightful when I get well again ! ”

Yes, Sylvanus thought it would be delightful indeed when she got well. But day after day went by, and still she was not well, still not strong nor rosy. An added shade of anxiety came into Lothrich's face on seeing her so transparent and languid while the second Otto throve and grew; but he had much anxiety beside in those days.

And now came a time when Hildgart might be glad of Sylvanus's dark strong hands to uphold her gently in the days of declining. They lengthened themselves into several long years, but came no less surely to an end.

“Dear God!” she sighed, “to leave my little child like this, and no one to love him as I should,—with his own father gone mad, and imperilling his substance in distracted ventures! Oh, Sylvanus, do you promise to be faithful and tender to my poor little Otto, as you have ever been to me; for he will need friends, I much fear.”

So she went away from among the living, and Sylvanus must continue in the house where she had dwelt.

He was not an honored and cherished son now; he was only tolerated,—and at such a price! He might be seen carrying the bales from the boats up the slimy stone stairs, and doing all that was required of a servant. Early and late he worked to deserve bread and the shelter of that roof which had covered her,—patient of everything, so he might be in easy reach of her child, to do him service.

No less, every night, lying on his poor pallet, he dreamed of the distant hills.

Years went by, — many years.

Otto himself was a youth now, — a slender, handsome youth, with curling hair that caught the sunshine and flashed it back. He was light-hearted, he was gay. He had many companions, and a jolly life they made of it. One little drawback there was, however, to his full enjoyment of this earth's pleasures, and it was that dark, melancholy servant of his father's, — God rest his soul, poor father ! though he was a foolish man, who in his ambition to double his son's fortune came near wrecking it, — that dark servant, with his continual good counsel and his untiring attempts to keep him, Otto, out of mischief. Why was he young, good-looking, and had his purse full of gold, if he was not to amuse himself ? As for poor Sylvanus, he had been devoted to Sylvanus when he was still a little boy, — one must own that Sylvanus was more obliging than any one else, — but it really seemed presumptuous in the fellow to suppose that he could influence one when he was almost getting a beard. Sylvanus was becoming a bore, and Otto must let him know what he thought of it.

Oh the blue hills far away, how inviting they looked ! Why should one not flee to them, and rest from drudgery for a thankless world ; feel one's youth come back to one with every fresh inspiration of the pure wind ; feel one's strength, wasted with homesickness and nightly longing, return with every draught from the ice-cold springs ; find one's own kin, perhaps, — strong, brown brothers ? Oh the beckoning hills ! Oh, what the wind said in its singing over the house !

“ But I cannot leave him now ! ” replied Sylvanus’s sick heart ; “ he is fast bringing on ruin to himself, he will need me then. There are a thousand duties to tie me down here. O wind, I cannot come ! ”

Once, indeed, it seemed too much to bear that stripling’s wrong-hearted insolence, and the old-grown faun had almost forsaken him. But when he had passed through the city gate on his way to the hills, — the hills ever calling him with their powerful, still voices, ever drawing him to themselves with chains as subtle as those by which the sky draws back from earth the rain, — a sense came to him, as if he were his old childish self fleeing once more as long ago from the merchant’s house, the narrowness of which cramped him so, oppressed him for breath ; and through his extravagant delight at freedom returned the haunting pain of something left behind, some one needing him, grieving while he made himself merry.

Ah, Hildgart, so long now in her grave !

So the faun turned back. He passed under the city gate bowed and dragging his foot. He would remember how young and foolish Otto was, how dear he had been ; he would not think of him that he was ungrateful, but that his eyes were very like those that once looked so kindly upon himself. For the sake of being able to serve him when the day came that Hildgart’s child should need him, — and the day was near, he feared ! — he must be very patient. Why had they quarrelled that morning ? He had tried to save the mad young man from the serpent-charmer’s daughter, who would be his bane if he believed her.

Well, he must return and make other efforts to save him ; but not forsake him, even if all attempts to clear his vision proved vain. How much more would he need a stanch adherent when fallen irremediably into the hands of that heartless girl !

But Sylvanus ill calculated his power in opposition to the serpent-charmer's daughter. When she came to the reign, full of arts and wiles as she was, beautiful as a crimson-flowering weed, and determined that the unfriendly faun who had accused her should go, his term of service, spite of his long-suffering, his selfless devotion, was indeed over. It was Otto himself who bade him go.

And now once more he passed through the city gates. As he came farther into the open country, the bitterness lessened from his soul. Farewell, old life ! all was said and done with it. Let him forget it all, but most the ingratitude of man. Let Otto find what compensation he might for the loss of a friend in the sea-green eyes of his bride,—away with all sorrow for Otto !

For the hills ! for the hills ! And he hurried toward them.

How often had he dreamed of this, — this freedom to return whither he chose ! He had not the strength now nor the lightness of foot to speed on as once he could have sped ; it would take longer to reach that faint-blue mass against the horizon and his home beyond ; but once there, would it not seem as good as it could ever have seemed before ? Would he not revel in it all, then ? Would he not join madly in

those scenes the strolling poet had described, dance and leap with the other fauns and the playful nymphs, satiate himself at last with sun and air and green shadow, sinells of the forest, music, chill crystal streams, — freedom ?

Dance and leap and enjoy ? Could he do that still, — could he ?

He dropped down to rest with his face to the sky streaked with bars of rosy vapor, — beautiful sky ! How tired he was ! He had been travelling so many hours, and the hills looked as distant as ever. Ah ! but he had all his life before him now in which to reach them, and after a brief station among them for rest, the southern land that lay beyond them, the land of his birth. There was no need of hurrying so breathlessly.

All his life, — all that was left over of a faun's life after so many years spent away from all his nature required ; spent in a narrow house without air, in a warehouse without sunlight, over tasks that made the irritated nerves sicken and twitch, under conditions that made the heart, subdne, rankle in its chains. Was he not stunted, wasted, and bowed already, like the aged and ailing ?

The faun rose hurriedly, and travelled on at once in the fading day.

It was well for those who had an abundance of time to sit down in pleasant grassy places and rest. He should rest only afterward, when he sat among his own, in the heart of the hills. Would not the nymphs then plait him a wreath of ivy and bay that should lie on his temples coolly, and Pan himself give

him from his striped gourd a draught that should restore him? What happy laughter then, what careless ease on a bed of ferns!

But there was need for turning every faculty to haste, for was he not pursued? Was it not advancing with long, swift, silent strides,—the nameless fear, the unknown foe? If it should overtake him before he gained the hills! How far they were still,—those hills! how blue still, so that one could never believe, no, that they were really clothed with green waving trees!

It overtook him before he reached them, even while they were still quite blue.

“But it is not I alone,” sighed Sylvanus, lying in the grass with eyes fixed upon the beloved hills, when the bitterness of the struggle was past, and the enemy after he had overcome him had smoothed the frown of pain and anger away from his brow and set there peace instead, as if almost he had been a friend. “I have seen it many times in that city where I lived. The faces of the men and women told it. They were not fauns, like me, but their story was like mine.”

The sun looked down most gently and mournfully into his face. It seemed as if the grass, when the wind blew it against his cheek, were a caress from a hand as loving as Hildgart’s.

“Would it seem a sweeter or a bitterer story,” went on Sylvanus vaguely, still with his dark sad eyes fixed upon the hills, the never to be reached, “if the fauns should tell it to one another when the

nightingale's song has made them serious,—sweeter or bitterer than stories of fauns who could do their own pleasure?"

A fine sigh passed through the grass, and died across his lips. A brown bird flew down and nestled fearlessly against him, its little heart fluttering warm on his throat; the sunlight cooled, and grew dim, and went out.

Then, oh, hark! the voice of the wind from the hills,—or, no, not really the wind's voice, but Pan's reed.

Is he not sitting among the fauns, piping to them? Have they not paused in their frolics to listen? Just as the strolling poet said,—the little does come through the rustling leaves, and stare with their great moist eyes; the fiercest brutes lie about with their heads on their harmless paws; the dryads draw nearer as he tells them of it in his song. Their faces are uplifted; tear-drops run over their lashes, down the thornless roses of their cheeks paled with tenderest pity: not a faun but has ceased to laugh. "Is it a sweeter or a bitterer story?" says the music at last. "Is it a sweeter or a bitterer story?" as it grows fainter, and all fades.

Hark! Did not the answer come as through tears, "Oh, sweeter! oh, sweeter!"

THE SONS OF PHILEMON.

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TWO women who had long been absent from each other sat in the deepening light of the afternoon, going over old common memories together, and relating the events of the latter years.

They had not been loving friends nor even well known to each other before. The difference in years had seemed greater ; yet now each proved a calm sweetness in the neighborhood of one who had seen her younger, fairer, who had been familiar, perhaps, with friends long dead.

Both women were past their best youth. Auge, the older, was growing gray ; her face showed lines of fretful care ; she stooped a little, and her voice in talking of any matter, even cheerful, had a faintly complaining ring. She leaned forward, both hands on the head of her staff. Her garments were of a sober color ; one end of her mantle was cast over her head and framed her face, shading it as a hood.

Antiope's hair was still dark and thick. Her age was divined more from the noble serenity of her face than from any trace on it of Time's deflowering finger. She was tall and straight and powerfully moulded. Her face was severe in its purity of line and color ; its only softness dwelt in the broad, dark, fine eye,

when that listened, encouraged, invited to confidence. Her whole bearing breathed a calm and seemly pride.

Sitting on the stone seat near her own threshold, she was bareheaded and without mantle. Her white garment fell in close, straight folds down over her feet. The mellowing sunshine was full on her smooth, bronzed face ; she shaded her eyes, and looked inquiringly down in the valley where Auge's finger directed.

The citadel gleamed white on its rock ; between olives and cypress-trees showed the little city, red and white ; the river was a narrow, silvery ribbon.

“ Do you see the house ? ” asked Auge, still pointing. “ I cannot see it myself, but it should be there, — there, a little outside the crowd, near the river. No ? Well, it is a fair enough house within, if it were well ordered ; with a large, cool court, — if it were not that doves are suffered in the court, and are forever drinking at the basin, and green vines are allowed to grow up the little white pillars, alluring insects. Well, so it will be ever when the whims of the young are consulted before the experience of the old.”

“ The young Philotis is mistress in her father's house ? ” asked Antiope.

“ Well-a-day ! But this is not the beginning of it. She has been mistress since the hour her mother was carried out of it, and then she stood scarce thus high. She governs her father, and is herself governed — oh, not by me, as you, perhaps, might think ;

me, who nursed her and reared her, watching her in illness as never a mother,— not by me, but fancies light as the little clouds you see a moment, then they are gone, or else when you look again they have grown into huge things big with bad weather,— you can never tell. Her father is to blame. If he would but listen to me! Judge yourself, my Antiope, of that man's weakness. We lived by the sea,— the proper place for us, where his heavy-laden ships come in. Our days went sweetly, one much like another, among good neighbors, with plenty. My affections had twined around every stone of our dwelling. One day Philotis says she suffers from bad dreams, it must be the fault of the sea, she would wish not to hear any more of its solemn sighing and sobbing. Lycaon comforts her; gives her lavishly of things too fine, unfit for a young maid. The next day she tells again of bad dreams, and wishes to go elsewhere,— anywhere, away from the tiresome voice of the sea. So every day she complains, and looks longingly at the hills; she grows pale with ill-temper and discontent. And in the end she has her will,— as she has had since she could frame words. And now we dwell down yonder in the house you cannot see, though it should be plain enough."

"And the girl has recovered?"

Auge made a slight sound of contempt.

"She was never ill. But if you mean does she laugh and talk all day, and is she full of foolish pranks as a young cat, I warrant you! This new life pleases her vastly. She is ever dragging me forth with her when I would wish to be quiet at home.

To the market-place, to the temple, to look on at the racers and the wrestlers, — not but that I, too, love that, — and disc-casting. But to be tripping after her like an old dog, panting to keep pace with her light young feet (and it is not seemly that a young girl be seen abroad so much, as I have told her father a thousand times); to be sent on mad errands — ”

“ On mad errands ? Now, that seems too much. Why do you go when she bids you ? Father and daughter surely owe you for all your kind offices consideration enough to take account of your objections.”

Antiope had thought to do a thing agreeable to Auge in taking her part against Philotis and that spoiled girl’s father. But, —

“ You do not understand, Antiope,” said Auge, promptly. “ You do not understand at all. It is because she knows how much I love her, because she knows that I willingly do whatever may please her. Ah, these children of ours ! Those who have no children will never understand how it is with us ! ”

Antiope could not but smile a little scornfully at these words. Her sons were her own, bone of her bone. Her face assumed its expression of contented mother-pride.

“ Where are your sons ? ” asked Auge, suddenly, after a silence during which each woman had been looking over the valley, thinking the thoughts nearest her heart.

“ A-hunting.”

“ Will they not soon be home ? I would wish to see them nearer and speak to them. The image of

Philemon still lives in my eye. Tell me, Antiope, if your griefs have so healed over that you can speak of his death with patience,— how did he come, the strong and goodly man, to die as he did in the flower of life ? ”

“ An adder stung him in the foot,” Antiope replied briefly, and without visible emotion. Then she proceeded in measured tones, as if she were saying aloud a thing that she had said over many times to herself : “ He has perished ; his flesh is ashes. Yet he lives,— on and on. That which was best in him — his justice, his integrity, his kindness — I meet with every day in my sons. Even his goodliness of feature and form is not lost. Biton looks at me with his deep, calm eye ; Attys speaks to me with his voice. Both have his dauntless heart. So is a good man immortal even on earth : his sons’ sons shall tell the world of him. I am blessed in my children,” she added, with a tender interruption in her even voice.

“ Yes, they are goodly and strong, like their father, as you say,” owned Auge ; “ I hear reports of them wherever I go. They are foremost in every contest, — swiftest in the race, most enduring in the march ; they overcome the stoutest wrestlers ; they cast the disc and spear farthest of any ; their honor is truly great.”

“ And to such prowess they unite such gentleness,” said Antiope, with eager fervor ; “ they so love me, and so love each other. You think, perhaps, that being so full of valor and skill, they are proud and testy, — many brave youths are. Not so. Biton

obeys my least behest ; Attys reads my wish in my eye.” And the proud, reserved Antiope, betrayed by Auge’s sympathetic, listening face into the weakness of the commonest woman, related untiringly instances of her sons’ virtues, — their frankness, generosity, filial and brotherly devotion. She told touching stories of their childhood, the reckless ventures and escapes of their growing days ; said her hopes and fears, quoted golden opinions uttered by such as were not prejudiced, as perhaps Auge would think her.

The sun declined to the hill while she spoke.

“ Happy ! happy ! ” exclaimed Auge, who had drawn nearer and nearer, as if warming herself at the heat of Antiope’s great mother-love. “ And tell me, does not your heart fail you,” she said, dropping her voice, “ when they go forth to war ? — as in these days every man does frequently in these parts, I am told, and chiefly against redoubted Charpedon beyond these mountains. I should think that the day they set forth would be for you an evil day to bear. The thought of that day would almost persuade me, if I had a son, to bring him up as a maiden. Are you not tempted, Antiope, to wish away from their ears all dangerous rumors of war ? ”

“ Not so,” replied Antiope, constantly ; “ I would rather they were dead than inglorious. But it seems to me when they are away as if my never-sleeping love brooding over them must be a charm to keep them safe. I do not believe, Auge, but that all will be well with them until my eyes are closed. I have no fears. I have asked nothing of the gods but my sons’ good, and the just gods owe me somewhat for

many pious offerings and several afflictions patiently endured."

"You think that to ask for your sons' good is to ask little for yourself," spoke Auge, with a doubtful laugh. "Perhaps that is more than long life with peace and plenty and health. The value of a gift is measured by the receiver's need. You are too fortunate, Antiope, though perhaps you do not know it: you possess your sons' undivided love. What shall you do now when they take wives?"

She listened curiously.

"That has to come. I have felt it coming," said Antiope. "I have schooled myself to accept the thought. I shall always have been their first and greatest friend. They will not forget it. Nothing can change that. Their wives shall be welcome. Whom they love must be dear also to me."

"My wise, wise Antiope, I vow that was well spoken, though I could not be so patient myself. Now, since I see your mind so disposed, I will tell you something,—something," she added with a mysterious smile, "that may perhaps pertain to this question. Perhaps, I said. Has Biton spoken to you of any maiden? No. Well, it was but a little thing. A few days ago, when he carried off the prize for running, we were watching the contest. As the runners passed us, Philotis, looking in rapt attention, opened her hand, and the wind blew a red flower she held into the path. Biton, though hard pressed, bent,—not hurriedly to snatch, but easily with a touch full of grace and respect,—and gathered up the blossom, winning the goal first, nevertheless. Since that

Philotis can talk of nothing but Biton, Biton, Biton ; and when she heard me boast that I knew his mother of old, nothing would satisfy her but that I should come to-day and renew the acquaintance. Do not think, however, that I would not have come unbidden. I can value an old friendship."

" Biton said nothing," spoke Antiope, dreamily ; then, with assurance : " He saw but a crimson flower, and not the maiden who dropped it. He stopped for it only to show his fleetness thereafter. I am sorry if your charge thinks of him overmuch. Auge, it were good advice, bid her look at men who look at her."

" That was not quite all," said Auge, with rising indignation. " He had the flower in his hand long after, smelling of it, and casting on the one from whose small fair hand it fell long glances. A bold and steady eye has your son,—an eye that knows its mind ; and when a pink-footed dove, Philotis' favorite, flew out over the court, and she came forth to lure it back, Biton was there — where mayhap he had been keeping lover's watch — to assist her in re-capturing it ; and that no later than yesterday."

" Auge," replied Antiope, with recovered serenity, " let us not speak bitterly. If Biton loves, I have no fear but he will tell his mother of it. Then will be time to provide further. What you have said of Philotis makes me think but lightly of her ; yet I will not rashly judge."

" To say that she is fanciful and of a merry disposition ! Youth is the sweeter for not being serious and sad. I never fear that speaking of Philotis as

she is will do her injury. She bears what justifies all her deeds even in her blooming face, the fairest in all the isles. You have but to see her to fall a-yearning for a daughter-in-law."

"That may be as it may. When Biton shall have opened to me his heart, and told me of his choice, then I will descend without delay into the city, and formally arrive at your house to see the maiden. Until then, allow me to retain my belief that chance brought my son near your door as the dove flew over the wall. And be cautious how you inflame a young maiden's imagination with feeding to it the praises of my son, as I have unsuspectingly spoken them from my heart."

"Have no concern," said Auge, rising, "that the gem of the earth should not dazzle, but rather be dazzled by a shining pebble, of such as the seashore is full. Well, I thought rather to be thanked than draw on myself dry words. My girl is fair, your son is brave, and I was ever an old fool wishing to see the young happy. Philotis did not bid me come. I doubt if her glance declined on your son long enough to tell him from another. I said what I did, looking for a different issue to our talk,—for she is fair, and he, to all seeming, brave; and I hope you may find a daughter-in-law fit to fasten on her sandals."

With that, old Auge took her departure.

Antiope watched her down the hillside, and as she was lost to view, fell to half pitying the good soul's delusions. Then her mind dropped lovingly and naturally back again on the thought of her sons.

Bringing up old sweet memories of their childhood had given new life to her pride in them. It was as if the love that lay like still, deep waters in the bottom of her heart had been stirred to bring up the pearls sunken in them, made to tremble and shine and feel themselves be. It seemed a long time since she had parted from Biton and Attys at break of day ; she yearned to see them turn the hill-road, coming toward her. Her thought caressed the image she called up of them as she had often seen them,— emerging from behind the rock that shut off the farther view of the road, equally fair and well-grown, Attys with one arm cast across Biton's shoulders, both smiling to meet her weleoming smile. She had never felt more keenly how blessed she was in them ; her heart was beset with tenderness, and to throw off its oppression she went quickly into the house to busy herself about their evening meal.

“They are late,” she thought, and repeatedly came outside to look up the road. “They promised to return at sundown. They cannot be far.” With a restless impulse to have them near her soon, a little sooner, she walked forth, up along the road they were sure to pass, thinking of them incessantly.

The sky was fading, and all the valley blurred with a violet mist. The light dew fell. Antiope walked slowly with upturned face ; and the peace of the perfect evening stole upon her.

Shepherds and flocks passed her, returning to the white farms thinly scattered over the hillside. These, forcing her to the side of the road and sometimes jostling her, broke up the skein of her thought. The

sharpness died from her longing to look upon the faces of her children, her disappointment at their delay; and with this release — Fate being busy at work with the threads of her life — came a half-formed desire to prove to herself her independence by prolonging her walk so long as it gave her pleasure, even though her sons might reach home in her absence.

She turned from the road into a field, and strayed through a vineyard, then on through a little grove, careless whither her feet took her, being well acquainted with the region.

So the divine night approached; the half-moon brightened in mid-heaven, — it could only just make a shadow, — while a glimmer of sunset light lingered above the hills.

Now Antiope paused to see where she stood, before beginning to retrace her steps.

The light was dim, but her good eyes served her. It was a pasture she knew, avoided by shepherds since a brown sylvan god was said to have been seen there sitting and fantastically piping. The ground was uneven, broken up by rocks into hills and hollows; once, as she remembered, dotted with sheep.

As she stood still to observe, a sound met her ear, — a faint sound as of struggling.

Her first thought was that a stray lamb must be caught in a thorn. She listened and moved toward the sound, pausing at every few steps to listen again.

It led her to climb over a ledge of rock fringed in every crease with short bushes and grass, tufted at the top with trees. The sound of struggling came to

her distinct as she stood among the trees. Beyond them the ground dropped to a hollow,—a nearly circular hollow,—at the bottom of which gleamed a small sheet of water, bluish in the first faint moonlight. Against that she caught the outline of a dark swaying object.

The last light of day was at her back; no ray of it reached the hollow, only a doubtful whiteness raining down from the young moon. By that she could scarcely for a moment tell if the forms were of man or brute.

She held her breath and strained her eyes. Then she perceived it to be two men struggling. At first she thought two shepherds settling their claims or differences; then a superstitious terror crept through her, and she feared it might be two sylvan gods ready to punish a mortal with blindness or madness should they discover themselves to be spied upon. Panic seized her; she dared not fly. She crouched among the trees with a loud-beating heart, and did not stir.

It seemed a bitter, bitter fight. Antiope could distinguish between the sounds now: the stamp of the foot taking fresh hold upon the ground, or the thud of the arm closing with a recovered advantage, the harsh hiss of lips gathering in wind, the crack of joints bending under the straining weight of the adversary; then the groan of effort as the knees were straightened, and the weight was lifted and held swaying a moment and violently cast.

But never did either of the combatants more than touch knee to the ground. Now and then the two

parted for a second to get a full breath, then closed with fresh fury, never uttering a word. The moon touched them with a wild effect, just suggesting their discomposed locks and garments.

Long minutes passed; the breath of both came labored and loud; they fought spasmodically, with greater display both of strength and weakness.

Suddenly, before Antiope knew how it had happened, they were on the ground, still desperately struggling, rolling and writhing; then one lay motionless under the other.

There was a long, long silence, cut only by hard breathing. Antiope could hear her heart.

Presently the topmost figure rose and held out his hand to the prostrate enemy, who grasped it and got to his feet tottering. Then the echoes were surprised with a double peal of laughter, strange and harsh, yet sufficiently human, at which Antiope's heart stood still.

No sylvan gods were these, as she knew by that sound. She gathered strength, and came stumbling down the side of the rock, impelled by a terror more insane than she had yet felt.

She had almost reached the wrestlers before they became aware of her.

“Biton! Attys!” she gasped; “is it you?”

The two men shrank back a step, and were still, struck dumb with amazement. Then through the gloom came a familiar voice attempting to subdue and soften itself: “Mother, how have you come to this place?”

“In good time I came, it seems,” said Antiope,

trembling with a passion of wrath and grief,—“in time to know your hearts better! Oh, me deceived! Would I had not been born! Would I had borne no sons! Oh, wicked, unnatural, abominable!”

“Hush, mother! Do not chide. Wait but a moment and I will tell you. I cannot stand nor speak, for pure weariness. Wait but a little,—or Biton, if you by any chance have breath left, make our deeds clear to our mother.” And Attys dropped to the ground, stretching himself his full size out on the trampled grass to rest.

Biton stooped over the spring and drank, and dashed his head with water. When he rose, bright drops rolled from his hair.

Then he turned to his mother, and spoke briefly and moderately, as was Biton’s way: “Not as enemies, mother, were we contending. We have no cause for quarrel. But we have been fighting since daybreak, and I am at last the victor. We were equally reputed above all others in the region for strength and endurance, and we could not live longer without knowing which of the two were the better man. Now we are satisfied. And that is all. Attys bears me no grudge,” he added, “as I owe him no scorn. Do you, Attys?”

Attys laughed,—a laugh broken and discordant from desperate weariness. “No; no grudge, no scorn,—loving brothers as ever. One had to yield, or we should have fought till we dropped dead. All happened as it should; the younger was overcome.”

Antiope groaned, and hid her face to shut out the changed world.

"Don't grieve, mother," said Biton. "You are a woman; you cannot understand. Then trust your sons when we tell you it was good, as it was unavoidable. No evil is done; nothing is changed. A little water to wash off this dust and blood and sweat, a long sleep, and there will be no trace left of this."

"O gods!" moaned Antiope, foreboding nameless disasters.

"Attys, you are more cunning with words. Persuade you our mother as we go homeward. The chill dew will stiffen us if we lie here longer."

Unsteadily the three regained the road, the men reeling as if drunk, in turns upholding and upheld by their mother; frequently laughing a jarring, excited laugh at their missteps.

At last they reached the house, and cleared themselves with water of all outward signs of the fight; clothed themselves in fresh fragrant linen, and with composed locks sat down to the fairly spread board beside their pale and solemn mother.

Their faces were warmly flushed, their eyes bright as the eyes of immortals; the excitement of the day's strife increased their beauty tenfold.

Antiope gazed in silence from Biton to Attys, and Attys to Biton, while they talked in a frank and friendly way, no else than as if they had returned after good sport from the ordinary chase.

They were as much alike almost as if they had been twins; with the same straight brows and clustering hair. But if they had been as near like as dew-drops, one familiar with them could have told

them apart from nothing but the look in the eye,— that in Biton's reserved, calm, secure, suggesting repose in power, not referring to other eyes for praise or blame; that in Attys' quick, smiling, beaming friendliness, appealing to all for favor, sympathy, approval.

As the brothers warmed with food and wine, their words flowed freely, more than usual grateful to hear,—generous, eloquent words. Antiope, watching and listening, felt a measure of comfort creep back into her heart.

When they had eaten, they declared they were dropping with sleep; and Antiope herself lighted them to their chambers, receiving cheerful good-night greetings.

Then she went to rest herself, but could not sleep. She was haunted in spite of her reasonings by a sense of something broken that could never be made whole,—something gone, not to be restored. She saw the long line of future days unfolding before her, and never one among them bright as the days that were dead,—not one purely golden, but all imperfect, chilled and overshadowed by this day's action. Her heart burned and ached. In her arms was awakened with a yearning pang the old feeling of holding children; and she sighed, "Oh that they were still little, and I were walking with one on each arm, able in myself to make both quite happy!"

Her couch was hot and comfortless. She arose at last and went out upon the roof, as she had done before on sleepless nights, to breathe the pure

dark air a minute, and see if the sight of the stars might not calm her.

As she looked out over the valley, something stirred near, below. On the pale stone bench where she had sat with Auge that day she dimly discerned a figure reclining. Her prophetic heart warned her unerringly. Casting her mantle about her, noiselessly she crept down the stairs into the shadowy odorous garden, moved to the bench, and touched the figure on the shoulder, saying, "Attys!"

The young man lifted his face from his arm with a start.

"Attys," said his mother again, in a tender tone that of itself questioned him, bade him lighten his heart to her, promised consolation.

"Nothing," he replied in a thick voice, unlike his own,—a voice that shut her out, forbade her, as plainly as did his slight gesture to remove her hand from him.

And she knew that he was struggling with his first man-sorrow, and that he refused to let her share it.

On the next day and the days that followed all was to all seeming as before. The brothers went forth together or with their companions, shepherds and huntsmen, on their various adventures and pleasures. No one noted a change in their manner to each other. Only Antiope, grown in her anxious watching wonderfully keen of sight, and in her deep sympathy morbidly alive to impres-

sions, was ever saying to herself: "Attys chafes. How will he make shift to be reconciled? He is casting about in his mind how to redeem himself. What will Attys do?"

But when after a time she saw the full light returned to Attys' eye, and caught the true ring in his mirth, her fears were hushed; she almost forgot them.

And as days went by, she had to wonder what agreeable circumstance Attys might be musing on when his face lighted in that unusual way,—Attys with this new whim of exquisite precision about his body's adornment. Biton's face did not breathe a quiet satisfaction like that; Biton's, on the contrary, was almost stern when he was not speaking. Though Antiope said to herself that she loved her sons equally, she owned she was always more glad of a joy for Attys than grieved at a cross for Biton. Biton disposed easily of annoyance, hardly showed signs of feeling it; and Attys could be so exuberantly happy, so tender when he was pleased.

At last she was enlightened. One evening Attys knelt by her side, and turning his confident face up to her, confessed, "Mother, I love."

Biton, who was present, rose to leave. But Attys said quickly: "Stay, brother. From you I have no secrets. I love, mother, and I am loved. She is young and good, and most, most beautiful. You will see her, you will make her welcome."

"Who is she?" faltered Antiope, confused she knew not whether with joy or fear.

"It is Philotis, Lycaon's daughter."

Antiope felt herself turn cold with alarm as a swift suspicion crossed her mind. She looked at Biton; he sat in his place with the calm face of every day. She looked again at Attys. His face glowed and beamed with a triumphant happiness. It warmed her to look on it; and the last lingering resentment for that night when he had suffered alone in the garden thawed before it. She could not but understand how a young girl, though not his mother, must prefer this radiant Attys to yonder cold, undemonstrative Biton, though Auge had said — But she had no reason whatever for saying it, as had been clear at the time.

After abundance of confessions and long discussion, Antiope rose at last, intent on preparing to set forth early and seek Lycaon. As she passed through the door, again that swift suspicion shot through her heart. It had seemed to her she heard Attys call out to Biton in his clear, gay accents something that sounded like, "Not in every contest is the victory thine, brother."

"Be silent!" commanded Biton, without raising his voice.

"You mean by your tone," spoke Attys, with little of the earlier sweetness left in his voice, "that you think yourself able to enforce your will."

But Antiope did not hear this,—only, as she withdrew, something indistinct, that she decided afterward could scarcely have been, "Not in every contest is the victory thine, brother."

So the days went by, in their appointed measure golden and gray. The moon grew more and less,

the seasons changed, and in their course brought the afternoon when happened what shall here be set forth.

On the same semicircular seat, out in the terraced garden, where Auge and Antiope had tarried talking of the past, and where Attys had wept, sat Philotis holding her little son.

The citadel gleamed white on its rock. The little city at its base showed white and red among the trees; the river wound like a silver ribbon.

Philotis had gathered her feet up on the smooth marble, and was playing with the baby, who sat astride her making clutches at her hair, which she in turns pulled over her eyes, concealing them, and pushed back, laughing out at him suddenly.

Against the stone that took on a dazzling whiteness from the deep blue of the sky, Philotis looked wonderfully rosy, her hair gleamed warm. She was in the perfection of youth; her face had still moments of touching childishness, and sometimes already that mature, experienced look of a woman satisfied with love and life.

The baby's playing was now and then stopped short, when the mother caught its little head between her hands to kiss indiscriminately with laughing, inarticulate, loving murmurs.

"Small Itylus, small Itylus, it is unseemly to pull thy mother's hair. When thy father comes, he shall know of it. I will say to him a bold, bold person in his absence pulled the hair he loves. He will take down his ponderous, bronze-headed spear, and say, shaking it while his big eyes roll, 'Where is

that person ?' And thou canst not flee yet on these dumpy legs that shall stride over such brave miles one day ; but perhaps mother will stand before thee. I will spread out my gown to hide thee, and say, 'I don't know what has become of that ruffian ; he was here but a moment ago.' Then thy father —" Her face lost a shade of its brightness as she stopped on that word to think a moment, looking away from the baby off over the peaceful valley. "Where is thy father now, small Itylus ? Ask that bird, and tell me what he says. Thou art almost as little as a big, big bird, and thy conversation resembles that of the wood-pigeons ; thou shouldst understand them. Ask the birds,— they fly so far, they see so much,— ask where thy father is, and tell me. Goo-goo — Ah, I see, I understand ! Goo-goo,— that means that he is well and on his way home to us. Goo-goo,— of course, my wise, small Itylus !" and the frolics of the happy pair began again.

Suddenly, with a glad cry, Philotis jumped to her feet, and clutching the baby made a few steps forward, her face wreathed with smiles, though the man, to meet whom she was running, was still too far to seize their welcome.

Then as suddenly she stopped, turned, and slowly went back to the bench, seated herself in a corner of it, composed the folds of her crocus-yellow gown over her little feet, set the serious grown baby straight on her knee, and watched the approach of the man with a calm, almost sulky face.

He advanced slowly, looking about for signs of life. Philotis was the only one in sight, except

servants about their various offices in the farm-buildings beyond the fair dwelling-house.

He came to her side. She had not readjusted her hair; the blooming face she lifted at his greeting was like a glorified sunflower, framed in delicate flame-like, gold-red locks.

“Is my mother within?”

She shook her head.

“Is my brother at home?”

She shook it again without speaking.

The man laughed, and took a seat at the other end of the bench, flinging his arm across the sun-warmed back. “Perhaps Itylus will tell me what has become of them, and where I must go to find them. Say thou, my promising nephew —”

But Philotis did not wish to be playful. “Your mother and Auge,” she answered with curt directness, “have gone to a neighbor. And he,—I do not know myself where he is. I took you for him a moment ago,” she added resentfully.

“That must have been bitter; and I am rewarded for looking like him by that exceedingly weary, disappointed look which politeness in the family forbid you should be at trouble to disguise. Another time I will send before me a messenger to shout, ‘It is only Biton!’”

“Now you are making me still sorrier that it was you,” said Philotis. “If you had come with pleasant words to tell me the news in the city, and how your fields and flocks prosper, I should only have quite naturally regretted that it was not Attys, whom I have not seen it seems for a hundred years. But if

you speak in that disagreeable, thorny way you have, I shall be sorry it was not some one else, — oh, without any choice whatever, you know, — any one but you; even Daunius, the goat-herd, with the wen on his nose."

Biton listened calmly, without apology or attempt at justification, or reminder that she first had offended. What Philotis did or said did not seem to him to matter very much. Being reasonable or just seemed out of her province. She filled her part sufficiently by being simply beautiful and sweet. There was felt a kinship between her and such things in inanimate nature as give one a reposed, unreflecting joy from their irresponsible scent and warmth, — June roses spreading themselves to the brooding noonday light, balsam-dropping trees exuding fragrance in the sun, warm wind breathing from over hay-fields. Having come within the circle of the light and heat that radiated from her soft, full-colored, perfect person, it would have seemed churlish to require of her deep and various wisdom and sympathetic understanding and fine impersonal judgments. Every one since she had been born had given her her wish; and now she took it with no thought but that all must be pleased with what pleased her. Since she had been born all had deferred to her, and at this hour she was not given to doubts of herself. Yet these things seemed almost no fault at all by light of those sweet, changeful, limpid eyes.

"Is my speech thorny?" Biton said at last, when Philotis had finished, and mother and child sat looking at him from their corner with great, sweet, hostile

eyes. "I must believe it is. I forget how to speak to women. But I will try to mend. So give me Itylus a moment, and I will go and find my mother."

She looked ready to refuse; then gave up the child grudgingly, and watched it jealously in Biton's hands. The child kicked, and Biton restored it to its mother before she had snatched it.

"What, Itylus!" he said. "You share your little mother's prejudices to-day. You are in an ill-humor with me. Wherefore? If I am a disagreeable uncle, like the wolf, of course, and the bear and the hornet,—I do not come often, nor do I stay long. And while I am here I try to be better than usual, I vow I do, though with the effect you see. I make great efforts to emulate the harmless woolly lamb and the unaggressive dove and the domestic cat. I frequently bring you gifts too, Itylus, though as soon as you have swallowed or broken them you try to put your fist in my eye. Why do you treat me as an enemy, sturdy little Itylus?"

"I will tell you," said Philotis, with eyes kindling at the opportunity to say what she had often chafed to repress. "Because he knows you are his enemy!"

"I?" asked Biton, after a pause during which he had turned a shade paler.

"Yes, yes, you are his enemy. You are my enemy; it is all the same. Where is Attys to-day? Why do you not leave Attys alone? We are happy enough as we are."

Biton stared at her.

"Yes, yes, that is what I say," she proceeded, a little fiercely now she thought of her wrongs. "What

does Attys want more than me, more than Itylus, and all his pastures and sheep and vineyards and bee-hives and servants, and his mother, and my old nurse to look after every want of his,—for Auge worships the shadow he casts on the ground. Why should you spoil all ? ”

“ Spoil ? How do I interfere, Philotis ? This was my father’s house, my home once. I have gone to live elsewhere ; I have taken nothing from you, not even my mother, though I confess I tried at one time to induce her to go with me. It seemed to me I needed her most.”

“ That has nothing to do with it. No one wanted you to go. It was you who became insufferable as soon as I had come to the house. They all said you were not so before, silent and hard as a stone, speaking only to sneer. Then you wished to go and to take your mother far from us all, high up in the hills to a solitary farmhouse. But she saw that in your quarrels with Attys you only were to blame. Oh, it was not as you feigned to believe,—that she loved Attys best. But she was too just to leave Attys—a good son ! — for you, the one who offended. You know full well that you might have stayed with us, and that it is your own fault now if you are lonely, and are falling into the manners of a savage.”

“ And how am I your enemy, Philotis ? ”

“ I have said already: Why can you not leave Attys alone ? He is satisfied, he is happy. Then you come back from your expeditions, and you tell him of them, and you show him wounds, and talk of dangers, and enlarge upon your prowesses, and you

say that his companions missed him ; you prate of glory — ”

“ Yes, I do ! ” cried Biton, flushing crimson. “ I tell him that his former brothers-at-arms ask if Philemon had not two sons, and if one of them is not perhaps bedridden, or grown too fat for action. I tell him that half of the fair name we won together in many adventures and encounters is rusting like a knife unused in the sheath. Soon it will not be the sons of Philemon spoken of whenever fair and knightly deeds are cited, but Biton, son of Philemon. For a sluggard is not esteemed, even though his youth gained a measure of glory ; he is forgotten, who would have been long remembered if he had died in the flush of his fame. Yearly the youth of this city and these hills goes forth to meet the enemies, to prove its strength and courage. Twice Attys has been absent. Things that poets shall make immortal have been done, and he knows nothing of them but their report.”

“ I kept him,” said Philotis, promptly and proudly, “ I would not let him go. I beguiled his attention from wars. I made him forget. I — I — I — ”

“ I know,” spoke Biton, sadly. “ You are a woman ; you do not understand some things. And there is a pulse in me that feels for you, that apprehends your way of looking. But Itylus here, this soft white bundle helpless now in your woman’s hands, that is yet the germ of a man and Philemon’s grandson, — he, when he is grown to his full heritage of strength and intelligence and finds it a dishonor to be called the son of Attys, — he will not have patience to seek

your point of view. Attys sleeps, I would wish to wake him."

"No, he does not sleep. I would the gods he did ! After you have been here with your goading words, he is restless, ill at ease ; he does not fully listen to me. If I am a woman, so is your mother, whom you respect nevertheless, who says too that the duties of husband and father are not the same as a bachelor's ; that he should risk his life no doubt if his country were in danger, but not for a freak, not in pursuit of every wandering fire of glory. No, Attys does not sleep ; and it is my spite toward you that you will not leave him in peace."

"I give praise that there is so much of his father left in him ! I thought myself that he lay asleep sunk in a thick idle fleece, and with ears stopped up fast to the sound of the trumpet."

"I tell you, I wish he were at home now, and asleep, or that I knew where he is."

There was a ring of sincere anxiety in her voice. "He may have gone just a-hunting he took his spear and bow. But he spoke mysteriously when he left, and told me not to be alarmed if he stayed away somewhat longer than usual. He charged me specially when he kissed me at parting not to make myself unhappy ; he would remain rather than that I should suffer, yet wished for my good word on his going. He hinted at its making me glad hereafter, and being for Itylus' best, and would not answer all my questions openly. His eyes shone in a way I do not like, — as I have seen them when you and he have been talking together of a time when I had no

part in his life. Biton, I feel as if I had you to thank that I have slept alone these three nights and moped three days. I have tried to make myself happy with the baby," she sighed; "but my heart when I let myself stop to think is very heavy. Oh, Biton, try to be friendly!" she suddenly exclaimed, after a space of gazing pensively over the valley, turning to him with wet eyes. "Tell me where you think he is, and why he stays so long."

Not a trace of her resentment remained in her face. It was soft and forlorn, tender with its great helpless, undisciplined love. Her tears grew and fell over her lashes, gleamed a moment on her cheek, and were frankly brushed away with the back of her hand.

Biton did not know what to say. His heart had warmed, by an old habit not quite outgrown of pride in his brother, at thought that her worst fears were perhaps realized, that Attys had awakened at last from the insensibility to glory that got him his contempt and made him ashamed to own him. But her sweet distress hurt him to see. And on second thought his first conjecture seemed to him rash. Attys was past hoping better things of. He encouraged her to look for the best, — what she held to be the best; he assured her of his firm belief that Attys would prove to have gone on some simple enough errand importing nothing more than worldly gain, — to acquire another farm, perhaps, or herds; he would come back to her shortly on his two feet in as blooming condition as he had left her.

He broke off from his speech with a burst of

laughter, and pointed where the hill-road emerged from behind the great rock. The figure of a man had appeared there.

"Was I not a diviner?" laughed Biton, harshly.
"See where he comes!"

He followed with his eyes the bounding figure of Philotis, who though burdened with Itylus was hurrying with blowing hair and flying robe.

Attys for a moment did not seem to see her. He dragged his foot as if weary. He walked with his eyes on the ground. At the sound of the glad voice he looked up quickly, and Biton discreetly turned his face toward the valley, and in his cold eyes were reflected the beauties of the sunset sky.

He turned again at their approaching footsteps. It was Attys now held Itylus, steadyng him on his shoulder with one hand. Philotis had possession of his other arm; she clasped her small hands above his shoulder, and so half hung, talking to him rapidly, laughing, rubbing her flushed, dimpling cheek against him.

The brothers faced each other. Attys' garments were travel-stained; his buskins were covered with dust.

Biton's eyes searched Attys' with a sort of hope, and lost for a moment the half-contemptuous look they had of late worn when turned upon his brother. Attys' eyes gazed back at him for a moment as they had used when they two were youths together, and the younger relied on the elder for encouragement, perhaps, or approval, or understanding, or assistance.

Then, as if recollecting himself, Attys assumed the

look of cold civility he kept for his brother ; and Biton retreated within his ordinary stolid indifference. But once more Biton was smitten with a sense of the pitiableness of his folly, the smallness of man's nature. He wished his pride would allow him to put a question that burned on his tongue ; but that stern master forbade. And they two had grown together, shared pleasures and pains and dangers, been without a secret one from the other !

“ Biton said you would be back,” babbled Philotis ; “ he assured me you had gone to buy sheep or something. I need not be alarmed, he said ; something without the least, least danger.”

“ Biton is always wise ; but when he assumes to read my heart, and finds motives for me, then his wisdom truly shines, and his generosity reaches its highest point.”

“ Why were you so long, my Attys ? Where did you go ? What did you do ? ”

Attys made a motion touched with weariness, and smiled with effort, yet making an attempt, too, to conceal both weariness and effort, which did not escape Biton, not engrossed like Philotis by pure joy at his return. “ Later, my curious little wife. I will tell you all later, when we have eaten.”

“ Are you so tired ? ” Philotis asked, sobering. “ Sit down at once and I will take him. Come, small Itylus. Yes, dearest love, you look weary. I was so glad I did not notice ; but your eyes are dark around as if you had not slept. You are not weary ? Then why do you look like that ? Attys, you are not ill ? ”

She put her hand to his forehead, full of wifely solicitude.

He laughed impatiently, saying he was well as ever; and when she, unconvinced, passed her hand over his brow through his thick curls, in an undisguised caress that yet had a medical purpose, he caught the hand and drew it down, still laughing faintly, and kept it prisoner in his own, while he asked concerning the events of the last few days.

The day was going; the sky above was delicate green, and over the farther little hills warm golden. The citadel, the pillars of the temples along the iridescent river, seemed to have absorbed the last sunshine, and still for a moment glowed rosily, though the sun was gone.

Attys, while Philotis narrated to him in full every trifle that had come to her ken since his departure, looked out over the earth, and cast his head back to look at the sky, as if something in both struck him more nearly than usual. He sat turned to his wife, but looked away from her over his shoulder; while she, leaning forward and stroking with one hand his hand that held her other, — Itylus wedged in between them and fallen asleep, — was satisfied to chatter on uninterruptedly. Biton stood at the other end of the bench, behind Attys, with one foot upon the seat and his arm resting on his lifted knee, contemplating now the group, now mechanically looking off and up to see what it was Attys saw. To him there was only the empty evening sky, the ordinary landscape.

Antiope and Auge returned to find them so. Attys leaped up with more than his usual eagerness to meet his mother; Biton approached her gravely, and she blessed both, and sat down with them and asked of their concerns. But most in spite of her wish she had to converse with Attys, for they lived together; she could not speak with the same knowledge, inquire with the same pertinence, of Biton's affairs, for he lived at a distance, and came none too often, and his answers at best were curt.

"Later, later, I pray, mother!" replied Attys to Antiope, as to Philotis, when she inquired of his absence. Then irrelevantly he broke forth: "A fair evening, mother! This is a goodly country, is it not?—fertile and beautiful. A good soil to have been born on. By the gods, I love it!"

"Yes, beautiful," said Antiope, looking out over it too. "I think there is not on earth a fairer spot. Once in thy father's day we went abroad in a ship, and visited kinsfolk of his on other isles, and a great city on the mainland. But though every one praised its splendor and wealth, it never seemed to me as fair to the eye, as good to be near, as that small city in the valley that yet no traveller comes afar to behold. I was sick with longing to return, and vowed not to leave it again."

"Ah, we know—we know that you are, above other women, faithful to your first affections!" said Biton.

Antiope turned to him a face full of displeasure. She knew that wounding tone he had assumed with her of late, and that in her dignity she had chosen to

ignore. It was his grievance that she had preferred Attys to him in her choice of a home. But she had been merely just, not partial. Now he was pleased to affect believing that she loved him—the first-born!—less than his brother, and he allowed himself in indirect speeches to reproach her. A resentful word was on her tongue; but a sudden, intelligent, impersonal pity checked it. If he were indeed so mad as to believe that his place was usurped in her large love, she could well understand the fund of bitterness from which sprung those unfilial words. The flash died in her eyes. She said, with more than usual gentleness: “You say well. I bear the changeless heart, Biton. Once loved with me is loved ever, though the object prove ungrateful and unworthy of my lasting kindness.”

And seeing his unmoved face, there came over her once more a sense of dull despair at the barrier that was rising ever higher between them, and that she seemed unable to cross. She, the justly incensed one, to whom his attitude was an insult, could not be the one to take the first step. And he, he did not seem to care that they were estranged, more than to let drop occasionally words that bit and seared. Where would it end? Surely, surely, she loved him now as at every moment since the first of his existence; but out of her love all that made it a sweetness to her heart was departing,—it was remaining to be only a dull, never-sleeping pain.

As she was reflecting on one son’s hardness, the other softly put his hand in hers, as if appreciating her pain. All her heart went out to him. Here was

one at least would never so poorly reward her,—one meeting her love with an equal, candid, undoubting love, never scanting the demonstration of it.

She pressed Attys' hand; and he, moved by a sudden impulse, as if having divined the hunger for tenderness born in her soul of Biton's repulse, dropped his head against her shoulder, as if he had been a boy again, and had come to her with some childish trouble. Only for a second; for Auge approached to take Itylus to put him to bed.

“Oh, leave him!” Attys begged. “He does no harm, and can take none. He leans against me; he is warm, poor little mouse! I will cast the end of my cloak over him—”

Philotis interposed, but he insisted.

“It will give him bad habits,” said the very youthful mother, seriously.

“Oh, habits! I shall not ask it more than this once!” said Attys; and as he seemed so unreasonably bent on it, the child was left him, and Auge retired, grumbling, with orders to hurry the supper.

“Have everything the best to-night!” Attys called out after her. “Honey and wine and fruits, and the flesh of a young kid. We will feast and be joyful. You will remain, Biton,—I pray you will; I humbly beseech! What! you are not curious of my journey? Yet it may not have been what you thought; there may be a circumstance or so of interest to you too. Come, stay. I want you all,—all about me; even this small, sleepy copy of myself. And if this whim of mine stunts his growth,—as by your great reluctance I judge you fear it may, Philotis,—you will

explain to him, when he bewails himself on his inferior stature, that his poor, fond father one fateful night refused to be parted from him; that he loved the feel of his baby weight against the fatherly knee — ”

Now through the dewy air came Auge's voice calling them in.

They rose and turned toward the house. Attys stopped half-way, and lingering cast his eyes over the fair dwelling, through whose open door streamed light, and over the farm-buildings beyond, — the meadows and vineyards and olive-groves all losing the strength of their color in the oncoming night, but still dreamily green and gray, and the walls a cool, ghostly white under the glass-clear darkening sky, stabbed by the first star's point of crystal.

“That house,” he said, — “if that house which our father built so strong and well had been dear to you, Biton, as to me, I swear you could not have lightly left it. Look at it! If a footsore, homeless traveller were passing, bent he knew not whither, conceive, now, how warm and safe and peaceful it must seem to him! And it is fair, too, to the eye, — very fair of shape and proportion, and meet for every season; but, more than all, endearing itself to the heart by a special indescribable grace that it has not in common with any other house. Is it, perhaps, that its walls stand around the memories of our childhood, mother; and, Biton, of our youth; and the first days of our wedded love, Sweetness, Philotis ?”

“I love you for your pious love for it,” said

Antiope, softly. They ascended the steps that led to the door, and entered the hall.

The triple-flamed lamps were burning, each high on its slender three-footed stand. On the higher end of the hall the tables were spread with fair vessels on a spotless cloth; burnished dishes, from which rose curling the savory steam; baskets with wheaten bread; broad leaves full of dried fruits and fresh; olives of last year, and the season's earliest gift of green and violet grapes. By the table that upheld the broad, shallow, ivy-wreathed cups and the slender water-pitchers, leaned the tall red earth jar sealed with pitch. To make festive the house for the master's return, the maids of the household had hastily twined a great garland of green,—sweet-smelling laurel and cedar; and that they had fastened to each well-carved white beam, so that it hung from one to the other all around the hall, dropping gracefully across the clear spaces between.

"No hand shall wait on me to-night but this," said Attys, pressing Philotis' hand before he dropped it; "I will have no music but of this mouth's making. You, my dear ones, shall be all my pleasure. Auge shall stay with my boy; she may walk with him to and fro. Shut out the others. We will be merry among ourselves."

So the brothers sat on fleeces spread over polished chairs for them; and the women served them familiarly, at the same time eating, they too.

Auge, who walked at the low end of the hall, where the light was least, stilling Itylus, who as soon as she stopped crooning to him broke forth in com-

plaints, between her snatches of song and her ruffled reflections upon Attys' interference with the established order of baby management, cast her eyes toward the little group at the tables, and followed their talk with half an ear.

Never for a long time had she seen them merrier; insensibly it charmed even her, vexed as she was for the moment at being left out of their joy. Attys, flushed in the face, with brilliant eyes, now that the hour for wine had come, splashed the marble floor with abundant libations to every god, and was drinking mad toasts,—to youth, then to beauty, to life, to love, to the light of day, to the light in Philotis' eyes. Philotis was laughing and teasing and playing, and giving him mad answers, affecting to sing only and dance only, not to be able that night to speak and walk like other mortals. She mixed him wine and water, poised on one foot like an airy goddess, holding her curved arm high, and letting the liquid flow in a long lucent stream bubbling over the edges of the cup. Then she knelt, and took from his hand like one of her own tame doves.

“I thought she had grown less like a young cat on a windy evening,” mused Auge. “This innocent bit of flesh and blood would seem heavy enough to have steadied her, to have put a little lead in her hands and feet. But no,—ever the same, laughing and taking no thought. So she was when a green bud of a maid; so she will be, I mistrust, till the red rose-leaves have dropped around the ripe cup, and the frosts set in. Well, a light heart is a good thing to have. I could wish one with a good will to

Biton, who can look on with scarcely a smile while she plays those pretty pranks. I praise the gods who determined that of the two it should be Attys; though at first — “There, there —” and she devoted herself to the son and heir, humming to him a homely ditty that she made up as she went, casting her eyes about to help her simple imagination: “If he will lie still and sleep, to-morrow I will give to him a fig, with a clear honey-tear in his eye. No? Then if he sleeps without another wail, I give to him what he would like, — a piece of the sun, a large, gold, honey-dripping slice. No? Then if he is a man, and does not kick, I teach him a charm to make him grow tall and red in the cheeks: and that is just to sleep and sleep. What? What? No? Hush, Itylus, Itylus, my joy, and we go together to gather the stones by the sea, little stones of every color; we get nests with eggs, and cones with winged nuts dropping out on every side.” And so on, so on. At last he was lulled; and she went softly to sit on the steps that divided the hall, with the child on her lap, covered over with the hem of her gown, — drowsy herself, wondering what hour of the night it might be, seeing the tapering flames but hazily.

“Now tell us, Attys,” spoke Antiope, a little weary spite of herself with the unusual merriment, of which she had been rather a smiling spectator than a sharer, “tell us the events of your journey. We have been very patient, Biton and I, while you two played the madcaps. And part of your audience, which you kept out of bed, I must suppose, to be improved, is dropped to sleep, and part is now likewise dropping.

You too are tired and overwrought ; this extravagant conduct I have suspected to have its root in an ecstasy of weariness. Dear son, you require rest. Tell us, then we will separate ; for the night is wearing on. See already how many shining constellations are dropped behind the hill ; ” and she pointed where between the doorposts was seen the nocturnal sky.

“ Yes, dearest of mothers,” said Attys, “ it is time to part ; yet you cannot know how loath I am to end this happy hour.”

“ I understand the joy at returning which makes you so frank in your tenderness to us all to-night. We feel equally the sweetness of reunion ; but we must not forget altogether for that the limits of night and day,” she added with her good smile.

“ Then pledge me in one more cup,” said Attys, laying hand on the foot of his cup, and looking away from them all out through the door at the sky that the rosy light within made look pale and far away, full of dim swarming stars. “ Here is to that possible homeless traveller that came into my mind before, who passes outside bent on a journey of which he does not know the end, and sees the fair lights shining here, and has a glimpse of this golden-haired beauty, and these fruits, this wine, that rosy child, this gracious mother, this brother so noble in appearance, so kind until one day—that faithful servant, this happy home in fine, then must turn his back on it ; go on, on, into the darkness — ”

“ Attys,” said Biton, starting up and placing his hand over his brother’s, that was unsteadily lifting the cup, “ say at once the worst there is to say ! I

have watched you ; me you do not deceive. You have strange and awful news that you fear to tell. Search my brain as I will, I cannot divine. Man, do not keep me dreading what it may be ! ”

Attys’ hand fell to trembling under Biton’s, as if a needed support were taken from under it ; he still looked away with a composed face, but the irrepressible tears came slowly in his eyes.

All were hushed, wide-eyed, breathless, as if spell-bound ; until Philotis jumped upon her husband, and cried out trenchantly, “ Attys, is this true ? ”

He dropped into his seat, pale, and made a silent struggle for his speech ; while Philotis, shaking his arm, pressed on him incessantly her question, sharp with fright : “ Attys, is it true ? What does Biton mean ? Bad news ? What bad, since you are here laughing like a boy all the evening ? Attys, Attys, answer me.”

“ Philotis, it has to come ! ” he said despairingly. “ Sweetness, I would keep up this pretence a little longer to see you laughing back at me, but I have no time left to be gentle. I must find the courage, and that quickly, to say what will alter this poor happy face to what I shall dread to look on. Sweetness, I have not an hour’s life to give you.”

Then, before any one could frame a question, he went on quickly, while all the sickness of his heart became evident in the altered, uncontrolled lines of his face : “ I am pledged to return to Charpedon. I think I must have been mad ! I staked all on my strength and alertness. Blindman ! I forgot the gods,—that they deny to mortals strength and

cunning equal to their own. Charpedon is their tool to punish my presumption!"

"But, my Attys, be plain," urged the little wife, impatiently. "I do not understand. Tell me what threatens you. Do not speak of the gods."

"Charpedon?" inquired Biton, breathlessly.

Attys turned to him with a sort of bitter exultation piercing through his dismay. "You will not be ashamed of me now, Biton. You will be forced to do me right in your mind. Great good may your belated praise do my memory! Ears of mine will not find it sweet. I failed; but if I had succeeded I should have left behind such a heritage of honor! Biton, no man single-handed ever achieved such a thing as I hoped to have done. The fell of the enchanted roe, golden-horned and golden-hoofed, that Charpedon inadvertently shot and afterward hung in the temple to appease the powers,—my quest was to bring home that. Such a trophy! worth more in glory than all your petty victories over that arrogant king."

"Oh, rash!" gasped Biton.

"Not rash if I had succeeded," said Attys, quickly. "Then it would have been bold, brave, not rash. I thought of it night after night. My plan was growing in my head by day even while, like a good, dull-mettled householder, I talked with my steward of gains and losses, sheep fleeces and seedlings. So delicate was my stratagem it seemed that my hand was already closing on the prize. I thought by one blow to clear my name, to force you to respect it,—all you who have affected lately to look on me from a height;

you, Biton, most of all, who should have known me. I wished to do what none of you scornful ones would dare ; and I did it. But it will not avail my good name much. Foolhardy and vain and weak of judgment will be all I get, because instead of bringing home the golden-horned roe, the enemy's best treasure, for us to hang in our temple, I return to perish for sacrilege."

"Return ?" breathed Philotis, with a blank, puzzled face, terrified without understanding the danger, and instinctively laying her hands fast on his arm to assure herself that she had him and could keep him.

Attys nodded drearily. "It would have been more beseeming the man I was attempting to be, to have perished scornfully, without asking for reprieve, defying them to the last. I humbled myself to sue for time to take one poor farewell of this, and this, and this. It seemed I could not die unsatisfied. The longing to see you once more, Philotis, my unhappy girl, was stronger than shame. Blame me not. The mad selfish thirst for the sweetness of your grieving for me was mixed with a wish too to spare you, who have never known a grief. This is hard, — oh, hard ! But think, poor Sweetness, if it had come to you through a stranger perhaps when you were spinning, singing to yourself, without a thought of care, that Attys had perished, that your eyes should never find him, that already he was gathered with yesterday's sunsets, with last year's snow, that he had gone whither the empty shades — I had orders, too, to leave behind me. Biton," he turned to his brother

with a face that dismissed all softness, his eyes expressing between a threat and a command, “once we vied together, and you overcame. Again we vied, and I outrivalled you. That strife was fair. Your gifts equalled mine. You were at hand to protect your rights. It was not my blame that you lacked ardor and confidence, and fortune perhaps. But there is no fair strife with the dead. When I am blind and deaf, helpless and unsightly, held well down in my place by the earth heaped on me, while you have your magnificent strength, your supple motion, and warm color, the light in your eyes, music at will in your tongue, then if you strive with me again for the prize I frankly not insidiously won from you, then I say you do what a coward does. You understand me, Biton ; do not measure strength with me when I am dead.”

“But, dead ?” said Philotis, after long tormenting his arm to gain his full attention, — “why do you say when you are dead ? Why can I not be made to understand ? It seems to me I am dreaming. You are here. I am holding you. Charpedon cannot get you, — here, on your own land, in your house, among your people. There is Biton too; and then all the huntsmen. Charpedon — ”

“I must go to him, of myself, alone. Philotis, I took a solemn oath, — by Philemon, my father. I had to swear so that they should know I would not break my word, else I could not have been here.”

“Attys,” cried out Philotis, beside herself with terror, “you are never going back ! Are you mad ?”

Antiope, whom dismay seemed to have turned to an image of stone, here lifted her hands and clasped them with a moan, full of pity and pain for what she felt coming. Auge wailed in echo.

“Attys, Attys,” insisted Philotis, trying to speak plainly and in a moderate voice, “are you leaving me? Do you mean that you, free now, whole, are going where they will kill you? Don’t turn your face away like that. Don’t cry, I have no time to cry. I must understand this thing at once. Attys, do you mean — Oh, immortal gods,” she screamed aloud, “he has said it, and I have understood! He wishes to forsake me.”

She shrank from him, and looked wildly about for a moment, then stared at Attys with a strange coldness, as if doubtful that he could be the man she knew; and finding something in the familiar sweetness of his features to reassure her of his being indeed the man who worshipped her, who had never willingly caused her even a little sorrow, she flung herself on his breast, and closed her arms around his neck, dragging down his head to her cheek; then she half laughed, with white lips, as she crushed him with all the strength of her arms. “No, that would not be easy, — to leave me. We are safe. Attys cannot go; he must kill me first, — kill his love, Philotis, who has given him everything, and would have given him a thousand times more, and a thousand thousand times over. Now, that would be grateful! Philotis, who — he says it himself — never knew a grief; who sang for him, and danced for him, and did up her hair to please him, and had not a thought in the

world but to do him good and pleasure ; who loved him, beside, with such madness that it seemed the effect of a charm. All her thoughts were knit to him ; she did not draw breath but in some reference to him. And now I will tell you, dear. When I was a girl I was truly happy. Everything was a joy to me all day long,—the sky, the trees, the birds, the flowers, the faces ; my heart was light as the air. But since we were wedded — it is strange — I have never been happy as before. I would not have changed back again,—oh, no ! but my heart was never once light again. That was because I loved you so. I have looked out into the sky sometimes as I sang one of my foolish songs people laugh at, and wished I could for a moment stop thinking of you, stop being aware of you, stop yearning for you with every fibre of my being,—for I was so tired that it was almost pain ; but I could never stop. I began at once to think, instead, how to make you love me always more, always more. Was it so with you too, dear ? At first I know you loved me most. It came slowly to me. I could have made you suffer then if I had chosen. Instead — And now you wish to reward me,—me, who— But Itylus,—even though you have forgotten his mother, and bitterly hate her, as it seems,—you could not wish to wrong him, our Itylus ! ”

“ Unhappy woman,” cried Biton, laying hands on her shoulders, and trying with as gentle firmness as he could command to separate her from Attys, “ that man is as much dead as if he had died at the moment when he took his oath ! Leave him his

strength. Do not tempt him to consider even the course of never-ending shame. Be a little brave, if you can, for his sake."

"Biton," denounced Philotis, furiously, turning her face to him without losing her hold on Attys, "be silent,—you at least,—or I shall say such things! You have always hated him,—you!"

"Mother, speak to this blind creature!" said Biton. "Make her understand. You bear witness for me that I cannot be hating Attys. Though you do not love me as you do him, you must do me justice to believe that. You know that we fought; you have seen that we have never been the same since. If we had been but a little greater of heart, he would have forgiven my victory, and I forgiven his revenge. But at this moment how can any hate of mine speak or be alive?"

"Bred of love or hate, you will have your wish, Biton," said Attys. "My time grows short. I should even now be on my way over the hills. I must be at the appointed spot before the temple at dawn of the third day from my leaving. Oh, Philotis, take comfort, take comfort! Mother, speak to her,—you! Auge, place little Itylus in her arms. Oh, be good to her, all! She has never known a grief."

"Attys," said Philotis, clinging and refusing to be put aside, while ever-growing terror painted her face with mortal hues, and her voice came strained, "you shall not go; that is all. I refuse, refuse. You think it a great and meritorious thing, perhaps, to leave wife and child, as Biton counsels, who has no heart, no human bowels; but you shall listen to me.

Charpedon may wait, he and his bloodthirsty dogs, in the dawn by the temple. We shall not come; we shall be far. No one shall know where; no one see us again. And whoever cries out on Attys, who swore by his father's shade and did not keep his oath, might as well be rating the empty wind; that shall not disturb us. I am ready. Give me the child, my sandals, my cloak. There are deep woods where we can live in caves. Ah, thank the heavens, a ray of light! My father,— we can go to him; it is not far. I know the way,— by the sea. There lie his ships. We will hide in the dark hold, and sail away, away, and not be heard of again. In a foreign place we will obscurely live, and still be warm in the sun, and love again, and grow old, secure, serene, in spite of them all."

Auge, sobbing, had approached; and now, kneeling, held out his child to him, to aid her mistress in softening his heart. Antiope sat like a statue, staring ahead with dilated, darkening eyes, saying no word.

The sweat stood on Attys' brow.

Philotis prayed on incoherently, breaking her spirit against his resistance, as a hapless, captured lark against the bars, interspersing her prayers with moans, her voice growing fainter, her hold less sure.

At last her passion-given strength was gone; her arms relaxed and dropped across his lap, her disordered head between them. She lay still, unable to contend any more, only vaguely shaken by long tremors.

Now Attys could escape. There was only to lift her, to lay her easily down where Auge would have ministered to her,—restored her while he sped to his doom.

Attys turned up the poor sweet face, around which the light of its gay red-gold hair looked harsh and unnatural now that it was all dead white like silver. Her lips were without color or breath; under each drooping eyelid shone a scant tear.

Attys pushed back the light lovely locks with a tender, shaking hand; bent, and pressed his moaning lips to her temples and eyes; then drew away, and took her cold round arms to lift her by and put her from him; then kissed the helpless arms, and feeling a strange madness come over him, went back with hungry lips to her eyes and hair. He could not steal away from her like a thief. He kissed her to bring her back; he must see her soul in her eyes again, like a desolate face in the window to watch him on his way with love and blessings. She did not move. For a moment the awful thought subdued him that she was dead already,—killed by his unkindness; and he kissed her mouth madly, uttering a cry of terror when it would not respond, and applying himself with a sort of frenzy to giving it warmth from his own. At last it stirred; then, his madness complete, he said recklessly in her ear, speaking sharply so as to reach her soul through her languid returning senses: “Sweetness, do you hear me? Awake! Well you said. It is all folly,—darest folly! Be glad again: I have chosen. To your father’s,—the ship,—flight!”

Antiope stirred as one awaking.

Biton uttered a great oath, and dashed across the floor through the open door out into the night.

“Son of Philemon,” spoke Charpedon, “the third day no more than dawns, and you are here. No less was expected of you. Still, I rejoice now with a freer mind that I found it in my honor to trust to the honor of an enemy. Your audacious crime is punishable by death. My grace to you in respect of your father’s great name and your faith preserved, is the choice of your means of death.”

“I choose,” said the doomed man, coldly, “to leap, myself, from the rock there into the sea.”

“The cliff is high; the sea below is fretted with foam from sunken rocks. You have your wish.”

One side of the white round temple on the cliff shone rosy with reflection of the kindling east; the other was cool and blue. Against the wall, among the pillars, were the grave priests with flowing robes and chapleted hair, the white-clothed priestesses who bore in woven baskets the fruits and flowers of sacrifice. On the polished marble steps stood the soldiers gathered on either side of the gray king, who leaned on his spear looking down on the man who had come to give up himself. In the open space before the temple crowded the curious people. The air was dewy, full of the smell and vague murmur of the sea that stretched a darkly blue barren plain as far as eye could distinguish.

“Have you anything to say?” asked Charpedon.

“Nothing, but that these events should not be kept

secret; that the name of Attys, son of Philemon, when his fate is known, should be duly honored among his own."

"Your punishment will not be hidden from them. It shall duly discourage the bold and sacrilegious. Look your last at the sun."

"King, were it not well," spoke to the sovereign a gaunt, large-eyed young priest who stood by his right shoulder, "to hold a moment, until we shall have heard what brings yonder man, who comes over the ground swiftly as a messenger bringing news of importance?"

The king looked along the cliff where the priest pointed, and saw indeed a man advancing with such speed as must impress the on-looker with the importance of his mission.

Every eye was turned to him, but that of the one who was taking his last look at the sun as it lifted itself placidly out of the band of pearly and rosy vapor, cleared its glance, and spread its broad smile over the quickening waters.

The messenger now reached the steps of the temple, and cried, panting with speed, "Late? Am I late? I was hindered; but I have not rested on the way. I am here, and the day has not much more than dawned."

Charpedon looked in wonder from him to the captive who stood unguarded in the clear space the crowd made for him at the foot of the steps. The captive, at the new-comer's voice, had looked up with a strange face.

"Who is this?" asked Charpedon.

“My brother,—Biton,” said the prisoner. Then the messenger turned and faced him.

The two brothers looked in each other’s eyes without words. The crowd was silent with wonder; and the king stared from one to the other brother, unable to say now which had been taken three days before.

“I am not Biton,” said the messenger at last, the color coming back to his face. “I am Attys, Philemon’s second son.”

“So declares of himself the other man. And it is wondrous strange; I could believe either, were his companion not in sight. Men, is one here that can tell which of the two it was we took in the act?”

“I am Attys, I!” said one of the brothers, eagerly. “Cannot you remember the trick of my face, as different from his as my mother’s face from my father’s? I can give proofs too. It was by the third pillar there I was taken.”

“His brotherly love makes him over-eager,” spoke the other. “Can you not tell the accent of truth from madness? I will describe the interior of the temple.”

“King,” said to his perplexed majesty the priest who had spoken before, “do you see yon dark figure advancing? I would counsel that we suspend judgment until it has come to us and delivered its errand. My spirit warns me it will be of moment. See with what solemn dignity it approaches—or is it weariness? It is a woman.”

The crowd opened before the tall dark figure.

“Mother!” escaped the lips of one brother.

Antiope looked, faltered. Then with a fire of terrible, anguished joy, her face lighted from within. She moved toward the temple, and knelt at the feet of the king. "Ransom, O King!—I bring ransom!"

"Noble lady," said Charpedon, his stern face softening a shade at sight of her solemn mourning, "in good time you come to preserve to your age a son. Which of these two is Attys the offender, which Biton?"

Antiope turned her still, strong face to the crowd, looked at Biton and Attys. Biton's face, as her glance dwelt on it, melted for the first time in many months, and their eyes recognized and greeted each other back across the long misunderstanding; Biton's eyes brightened and grew wet, but no tear fell from them; his eyelids did not tremble. He looked away over the sea, and the fresh wind dried them.

And Attys' burning face trembled and glowed and shone with repentance,—with gladness that he had vindicated himself in his brother's thought, with assurance of a love that is stronger than jealousy. He smiled at the death he saw near, suddenly reconciled. He lifted his head as if the wreathing curls had been a crown of glory, and waited his mother's word to take his rights.

From Attys to Biton Antiope looked, while all waited breathless. She met the strong compulsion of Biton's eye and the prayer in Attys' that she should pronounce quickly. She made as if to speak; then the strength failed completely from her face. The two men leaned to her, intent on her lips.

She looked at the king with all her mother-soul in her eyes; she put out her hands and cried, "O king, I cannot — cannot choose between them!"

And godlike Charpedon — so the story ends — forgave.

THEODOLIND.

THEODOLIND.

THROUGH the harsh, triumphant shout that shook the rafters at entrance of the captive sons of Hortewein, no ear but one caught the sound of a half-stifled moan of pity. That was Cynric's. He turned his eyes quickly on the queen. The lips that had involuntarily cried out were still parted ; the queen's eyes were fixed, staring and anguished, upon the wretches that had been brutally dragged and driven in, and now stood opposing their fierce, proud, bloody faces to the taunts of the sons of Ulf, the mocking of the earls.

They were seven,—each with his arms fastened behind him,—bound together monstrously in a sheaf.

The youngest was little more than a boy. The blood from a broad gash in his head had flowed over his hair and face ; it had settled darkly around one eye, that glared grimly bright and blue from its tragic setting. He showed his teeth like a wolf ; all his young muscles were swollen with the impotent effort to burst the thongs that held him.

His brothers, bleeding and torn, like him were fitfully struggling,—all but one, whose shoulder an axe had nigh severed from his trunk. This one's knees bent under him ; twice and thrice he stiffened them

by an effort that made the blood rain freshly down his side. He tried to raise his head, clothed with long red-gold locks, once more to breathe back hatred and defiance at his enemies ; but it had grown too heavy, it dropped on his breast, and rolled helplessly from side to side with the violent motions of his fellow-prisoners.

The last of Ulf's sons, the younger Ulf, shook his fiery mane, and pointing to the wound in the dying man's shoulder, boasted loudly : " *T was I did that ! A handsome hole !*"

The appearance of the victors was little less graceless than that of the vanquished : they had sat down without attempt to remove the signs of the fight ; the hands that grasped the ale-horns were a grawsome purple. It was but the fever of triumph, the flush of drink, kept the young men as yet from feeling the smart of their bare wounds.

The elder Ulf looked from the sons of Hortewein to his own wild brood, and his deep-set eyes warmed with the pleasure he had in the sight.

And Cynric, while the storm kept up its din outside, and the drunken warriors again, after the prisoners had been removed, filled the smoky hall with their savage songs, sat observing the unconscious queen.

This man was not so rough as his companions. Not often did he drink till his brain was drowned ; he could fight as well as the best of Ulf's sons, slaying with as scant reinorse, but battle was not to him the breath of his lungs.

His garb betrayed a hint of research : the hides

that formed his tunic were not the shaggy fells that covered the greater number of his fellows ; the skins were dressed and stained in a dark blue color with rude designs of dragons. His left arm, lying near Ulf's and showing slender beside it, was adorned with heavy bracelets, both of gold and iron. He was darker of hair and cheek and eye than any present. The expression of his features was subtler than the others' ; his smile was intelligent, cunning ; his locks fell composedly along the sides of his narrow face. He was said to have travelled far, to have seen men and manners, visited even great Rome. He was reputed wise ; the king considered him, took counsel with him. On occasions he had been the king's envoy : when the British Gortimer, weary of war, sued for peace, and offered as pledge of good faith his child Theodolind to be Ulf's wife, Cynric was messenger between the kings ; and when Ulf, secretly weary too of thankless warfare against a beggared people, dwellers in a hard mountainous region, accepted, it had been Cynric's to bring the bride to her new lord's home.

He thought of it now as he looked at her, and took account of the change in her face since the day it first shone on his sight.

He recalled the slow journeying over the mountains ; in memory again he turned back from a high point to observe the procession moving up the steep road, — the men, swinging bucklers clashing with each stride, helping themselves with their spears that rang against the rock ; the slaves of the conquered bending beneath their burdens ; and lower, on an

uncovered litter borne by stout-limbed carles, Gor-timer's daughter, motionless, with eyes closed, save when perhaps at sight of an eagle the men gave a shout.

Well he remembered the face as it then appeared,— white, sad, but the long oval of the cheek sweetly curved; the outlines soft, maidenish; the eyes full of that dewy light young eyes retain while sorrow is new.

Now the bloom was forgotten from her cheek; its growing hollowness could not be hidden by the two large, fair braids that fell on either side of her face down her bosom. Her lips were no more than a very humble, sickly-red rose. In the instinct of her face to express nothing, all of its life had incontrollably taken refuge in the eyes; when the shadowy lids shut these in, the face became as an effigy hewn delicately in pure stone.

And Cynric at his leisure studying it unnoticed, while all around him were noisily occupied with wassail and song, thought long thoughts.

The disorderly clamor gradually died away. The lights went out, burned down to the end. The rosy glare from the hearth served but very dimly to reveal the revellers sleeping.

The storm had passed. No sound was heard but heavy breathing, with now and then an uneasy moan from some hero who felt the stab of his wound through his sleep.

Then Ulf, who sat nearest the fire with his head dropped on his breast and his great legs thrust out among his dogs, dreamed a dream. A snow-flake

settled on his hand, lingered a brief space, and melted, leaving a light, chill impression. Then a cold, soft bird dropped against his breast, fluttered there an instant half frightened, pressed closer, closer against him as if seeking warmth.

Such sharpness of reality belonged to his dream that he unclosed his eyes to see what manner of bird it was ; dimly he perceived a face not far from his own, and a hand laid on his breast.

He blinked sleepily a few times, scarce knowing if he were awake ; at last strained his eyes wide, and through the gloom had a darkling, dubious vision of his wife.

The dying firelight just touched her hair, and followed the line of her robe down her shoulder. She seemed to be kneeling, and touching his breast.

Assured then that he dreamed, he closed his eyes again, dropped his head so that the locks of his hair and beard mingled, and was relapsing into leaden unconsciousness, when he thought the bird stirred impatiently, and he heard himself called in smothered tones, "Ulf ! Ulf !"

"Ha !" he answered aloud, starting and tossing back his hair.

He bent forward and peered into the face. It recoiled a little, then offered itself steadily to be scanned. His breath swept it. He could but see two great shadows that were the woman's eyes, and a glint of gold where the light faintly smote her hair. He leaned back, full of a drowsy wonder.

Then, afraid lest he should be off in slumber again, she called low, "Ulf ! Ulf !"

“ What wilt thou ? ” he asked aloud.

He felt both of her hands clasping his, her forehead pressed against it. His dazed astonishment grew, to discover that she wept.

“ That they may not die ! ” she murmured.

“ Die, woman ? ” And he cast about in his slow, clouded mind for an interpretation of her words. “ Who dieth ? ”

“ Those unfortunate souls, — Hortewein’s sons.”

The king made a sound, as if the lion should laugh, and thrust back the kneeling figure.

“ Yea, they die to-morrow betimes. So we crush the dragon’s brood,” he growled ; “ so we stamp out the nest of young adders ! ”

“ Ulf,” pleaded Theodolind, seizing his hand again in the earnest clutch of her slender fingers. “ Dost thou not know what pity is ? Hast never heard of mercy ? So will God do to thee as thou dost to other men.”

“ Yea, good. And if I am taken in battle I shall not look for life.”

“ Ulf, Ulf, think for a breathing-while that thou art taken ; nay, think that thy best-beloved is taken, thy dearest son, the image of thee, perpetuator of thy name, the younger Ulf. He is wounded sore. His heart is faint with the blood he hath spilled : courage oozeth out with the crimson stream. He hath been haled by the gory hair before the enemy ; cruelly mocked hath he been, heavy blows hath he endured — ”

“ Ha ! ” exclaimed Ulf, through shut teeth.

“ They have cast him in a cold keep, in black dark-

ness, to await death. And there must he not think a little of the fair earth he leaveth, the good life in the sunshine ? Must not his green youth yearn for the delights that had been promised him, and that he shall exchange for a joyless bed of earth wet in the wintry rain, or the maws of kites and eagles ? Think that the younger Ulf is at his death ! and that even when there is no hope more for him, compassion moveth the heart of his enemy, — thy Ulf may go ! Wilt thou not bless the pity that saved him ? Oh, pity is fair, mercy is good ; pity thy own soul, Ulf, have mercy on thyself. God will remember that thou didst spare others, when he judgeth thee — ”

“ Thy God shall not judge me at all,” cried Ulf, weary of her words. “ My gods shall praise me for those I slew, and give me the old gray fox, Horte-wein, his skull for me to drink from. Merrily will I quaff — ”

“ Oh, think not so, my husband ! Thy gods shall then long have perished, — faded in the twilight that hath no end. It shall surely be the Prince of Peace calleth thee to account for thy blood-red hands, the mild Shepherd of Men. It will not be enough in that day that with all my breaking heart I plead for thee.”

“ Lovest then thou me ? ” asked Ulf, in stupid wonder.

“ I love thy soul, — all human souls,” said Theodolind.

The king leaned back, possessed with a dreaminess that was not all of returning sleep. He no more heeded her words, — foolish woman’s babble ; but

in the half-waking condition of his spirit he was soothed by the sobbing murmur of her voice: it gave him a luxurious sense of his strength, to feel her imploring, as it were an eager wave beating and foaming, chafing and lapping, at the base of a rock. But most he was pleased — yet in an unformed, sluggish sort — with the unused sensation of her silken fingers curling like obstinate tendrils of the vine around his strong forefinger and thumb.

The barbarian's mind moved slowly. Did the woman think, he hazily mused, that Ulf could be softened by the falling of a little clear, bitter water, — tears; or yet moved by awe at thought of a time when he should stand for judgment before a foreign god not friends with him? Nay, by the Thunderer, he would fight that peace-loving god and overthrow him! And if his own heroic masters must in the end be merged in twilight, — as indeed a solemn prophecy had whispered, — he should himself sleep in the starless shade along with them, his battle-axe at his side, his hollow shield over his heart. What might she think of him, this puny daughter of Gor-timer? Six moons had she lived under his roof, a little-valued hostage. Had he shown her one small sign of favor, that she should presume on his indulgence? Nay, he had not even so done that he should become endeared to her as to his dogs, — by harshness and blows. He had seen her but as a bit of his household furnishing until he got used to the sight, and then been aware of her no more.

He looked down for her through his half-closed eyes; the fire had so sunken that all was but shad-

ows. He stretched out his hand doubtfully ; it brushed her hair, and met the soft, thin outline of her cheek. She was still disconnectedly pleading : “ Ulf ! Ulf ! I do conjure thee that thou grant their lives to the sons of Hortewein. And having given them life, how not give freedom ? without which life is ashes,— I know it well enough. Faithful, loving servants will they become of thine, owing thee more than children to their father ; and the bright angels will set it in their golden book. I too will bless thee. Oh, it is good, good for him who hath power to hurt to heal instead. It is like God. The soul remembereth it gladly in moments of desolation, in the weary watches of sickness, the declining of age. So tasteth the draught of cold water to the fever-smitten man as the remembrance of a merciful deed — Woe’s me ! He heedeth me not,— he heedeth me not ! ” she suddenly, softly wailed, and shrank away. A whisper of stifled grieving reached him through the dark, as if from the ground at his feet.

A softer sense overcame him,— a feeling remotely akin to gratitude ; such as he had proved once when a beautiful, unknown bird his javelin missed came and fearlessly settled upon his hand. He had not harmed that bird, but flattered its rainbow wings and let it go, yet with a yearning at losing the bright, trusting creature.

And if he should release the sons of Hortewein ?

A swift image of his sons’ indignation leaped in his mind. As by light of noon, he viewed their angry faces ; he heard high, rebellious words. Instant wrath fired him. He drew himself up with his grimdest

look, as if fronting them all ; clinched his iron hands, and bringing his right violently down upon his knee, shouted, " Ha ! the master am I ! "

There was a scattered movement of disturbed sleepers.

" What happeneth ? " drawled a voice or two.

After a space the questioners, had they not promptly resigned themselves to their interrupted business of sleeping, might have heard in the royal voice these words delivered : " I give thee the seven lives, — nay, I fear me they are now but six."

The sun had sunk. The coppery flush, still warm at one point of the horizon above the far, far mountains, told where he had last shown his glowing face.

The sky was soft and vaporous. A wave of pale gold slowly rolled back from the west to the zenith. The motionless bars of delicate mist drank it un-eagerly ; languidly they brightened. Then, as all insensibly faded, there rose from the square stone tower where it was the queen's habit to pace at evening, a low sound of women's voices singing in unison : —

" To Thee ere daylight dieth,
O Maker of all things,
We pray, that in Thy mercy
Thou keep our souls from harm.
No evil dream affright us,
Nor phantom of the night.
Our Enemy be baffled.
That when the new day breaketh,
We praise Thee unpolluted."

The queen stood against the parapet, her clasped hands on the stone, her face piously lifted.

A group of her women tarried near. Of these most had accompanied her from her home,—companions in misfortune; a few, whose voices still followed tentatively when the evening hymn was chanted, were of the pagans, who lately with great wonder had heard of the Cross, and won over to hope good for their souls, craved to join in praising the Christians' God.

Her devotions finished, Theodolind remained gazing toward the mountains. Between her and them lay great stretches of rolling forest, standing since the beginning of the world. The green of these was turning gray; thin mists rose from them.

The women spoke in whispers: their mistress thought of her youth's home beyond that purpling boundary.

Suddenly all eyes were lifted to the same point. Several voices exclaimed. A large white bird flew by on slow, tired wings; returned, flew farther.

The women stood quite still, to encourage this poor creature to stop among them. It came low and seemed about to settle, when, alarmed at their human faces, it rose again painfully. Then an arrow shot up from below pierced it unerringly in the heart. It dropped fluttering, and the distressed women gathered about it.

Theodolind took it up in her hands; it lay on them warm and heavy. The tears came in her eyes before she could think to harden herself. The women murmured sympathetically. She felt a warm moisture

slipping through her fingers. She laid the bird down on the stone and knelt near it, smoothing it as if it still could feel.

In that posture she saw a man's head and shoulders appear above the turret stairway. She rose. Cynric came toward her, bow in hand. The queen pointed to the bird at her feet.

He stooped to recover his arrow. In the act of withdrawing it from the wound, he looked up suddenly, having heard her catch her breath. He paused, observing her pained frown; for a second seemed at a loss, then, with a determined jerk, possessed himself of his weapon.

"I did not think to offend thee, lady," he said, rising. Then, finding himself near enough to speak without being overheard, he added, under voice: "I came to serve thee. Bid these withdraw a step. I have words of weight to speak."

Theodolind let her eyes dwell on his face a moment in silence, and without making any motion to comply. He smiled faintly under the continued serious scrutiny of her eyes, acknowledging the presence of her distrust.

In a glance she had realized the vanity of trying to read that comely, guarded, politic face; with which the sun too had made himself accomplice, lending it a smooth bronze mask to cover all possible revelation of the tell-tale blood.

She felt helpless before it, yet void of any fear. She motioned to her attendants, who withdrew to the farther side of the tower. She returned to the westward parapet, and Cynric followed her.

“ Speak ! ” she said.

He did not obey at once, but watched her cold half-face turned as earlier to the fading mountains, seeking a hint from it how to proceed ; but her face was to him as blank of counsel as his own was to her.

“ Hast thou taken account of the storm-black looks the athelings cast on thee ? ” he spoke at last. “ Thou hast incensed them ; thou hast made them hate thee. It is not wise, believe me, to brave such cruel men.”

“ I saw their black looks. But they were never friends of mine, though I have never wished them evil, nor shall. So I have lost no friend ; and seven I have gained,—nay, six. Alas ! that cruel wound in his shoulder fordid the other ! Even as worldly prudence would have me count, I have been no loser.”

“ Thou countest thy gains. But thou hast not thy seven new friends for long, I fear. Not if I know Stuf, and Eadel, Thankworth, Rotherloew, and our little Ulf. Not if I have learned well the meaning of that stilly smile which goeth with a frown in one honored family. Hortewein’s sons are not doomed long to rejoice ; not if I know my good blood-hounds.”

“ Oh ! oh ! oh ! ” moaned Theodolind, turning to him and gazing piteously. “ Are they such hard men ? But Ulf can govern them : he is the strongest of all ; to him I will appeal ; he may listen to me once again.”

“ Wilt thou set father and children against one

another? Wilt thou bring about such unnatural strife?"

Theodolind could not answer, but faltered: "Wouldst thou have the poor souls taken again and butchered?"

"Not so! But there are other ways than that Gortimer's daughter should abase herself to the king."

Something in those words made the queen, who in this trouble had bowed her head, quietly resume her full stately height, and look the minister in the eyes, all trace of emotion gone from her countenance.

"Forgive my bluntness," pursued Cynric; "but indeed it hurteth to think of a great king's child, beautiful and delicate too, kneeling at those feet, making petition with tears, with persuasive hands. Thou knowest him not, or thy pride could not abide such humiliation. I feel it no disloyalty to my king to speak of him as he is,—he glorieth in himself. Beside, lovest thou not truth? Should not truth be spoken? He is rough and hard within as without,—a coarse, cruel, rugged animal. Build no great thing upon his having once heeded thee, granted thee somewhat. It was not for love of thee or for mercy's sake, not from any softening of the soul,—it was his whim; it was to make his power felt over his wild lads. He will not gall them overmuch, trust that: he knoweth his own part in them too well. When thou pleadest again, there is a king's daughter in the land may be spurned with his foot. Or—beware lest he should fancy thee! Thou hadst best efface thyself,

cower and lie low, make thyself as like a shadow as thou canst in this house,—quench thy alluring gold hair altogether in thy veil. It is not that in thy tender beauty which maketh thee like angels, that before which a man of heart and understanding is subdued to reverent adoration, can appeal to this giant simpleton. Thou couldst never be more to him than a hedge-rose, to be brutally breathed a moment. Forgive me. What I have wished to say is that thou canst spare thyself the abjectness of fawning on such a boor. That which thou wouldest obtain is to be had by other means, and easier."

"Thy means?" asked Theodolind, in a quiet voice.

"There is a man whom the king deemeth wise and prudent, a man whose voice hath weight with the royal counsel, a man whose thought travelleth swiftly and findeth many expedients."

"Thou speakest of thyself," said the queen.

"Yea; hadst thou desired of me the lives of those captives, I could have got them thee, and without the rancor of the athelings. I could have found such reasons for clemency that I should have been thanked by the lion's whelps for rescuing from them their prey. Hast not thou seen enough to have faith in my influence?"

"Oh, I have."

"Prove it. Is it not easier, O Theodolind, to say 'Cynric, do this thing or that thing,' to a faithful friend, upon whom not one of thy gentle, wonderful graces or virtues is lost, than demean thyself at the feet of an unfeeling block, the foe of thy father and of all thy race, by whom thou art less prized than any

of his dogs? Through me thou mayst yet reign,—secretly for a time; but when the order of things changeth," he added, dropping his voice still lower, "openly, it may be."

He paused, and looked keenly in her face, to measure her understanding of his words, and their effect.

But the gathering shadow baffled him. He could distinguish still the faint, thin flash of the golden circlet across her forehead; her mantle was vaguely blue in the lingering light, and her white robe just gray with the growing darkness; but he could not satisfy himself from looking at her eyes what they betokened.

He felt an uneasy despite that he must speak further without surely knowing.

"Wilt thou trust me?" he ventured; and as she did not speak at once, he went on more urgently, risking much to overtake what might be escaping: "Thou must have divined how from the day I saw thee first, I have pitied thee, king's daughter,—oh, more than ever thou those tortured captives yesterday!—and had but the wish to serve thee. Hast thou not felt my eyes following thee devotedly? Now it is for thee to speak."

"Cynric," said the queen, in a passionless, slow voice, "if thou meanest well, I thank thee; or if thou but think that thou meanest well, still I thank thee. It is only thy understanding, of which I think thou hast boasted to me once or twice this hour, that misleadeth thee. Thou dost not know me well."

She paused; then went on most simply,—

“I have no pride to humble when I kneel at Ulf’s feet, a suppliant for his pity. If he spurn me, no vanity is hurt. From his anger, from the revenge of his sons, however bitter it be, I have nothing to fear. Thirst for vengeance there is none in me. And thou — thou hast nothing to give that were my gain. Helpless as thou, as any one might deem me, thou must see how yet I am very strong. I have nothing, nothing,” she repeated, with a vague gesture toward the great world, opposing to all its possible wealth and power her two naked palms, — “nothing to lose.”

There was an absence of feeling in her voice that made it mournful to hear in one so young.

“And it is not, I will tell thee for thy further instruction,” she pursued, “since thou valuest understanding of the human heart, that griefs have frozen mine. It was still alive when that tired bird who sought a refuge fell shot, — though the worst that it can suffer it hath already long submitted to. But I have chosen my part, — to endure with dignity all that can be put upon me, leaving the issue to my God ; trusting, since I cannot understand. There was, I think, some treason in what thou saidst of my lord, as well as some dishonor. It is well thou shouldst learn that I am his loyal wife. The good of his soul lieth near to my soul. Thou knewest when thou spakest to me how undefended I am, how powerless to avenge an insult to my womanly delicacy, had I any of such refined pride left in me. The helpless have an instinct to guide them : that telleth me, it were wiser to trust

Ulf, fierce and cruel as the lion, than thee, that art a serpent."

She could hear in the twilight Cynric's breath coming quick; but when he spoke it was in a voice as measured and calm as her own, almost as if he were subtly mocking her manner:—

"Thy understanding no more than mine warneth thee infallibly. I have uttered no treason, nor have I meant any offence. I have but tendered service to my queen. There are rumors—whispers as yet—that a time approacheth when a friend might stand thee in good stead. Thy father is not all content with peace; keeping faith wearieth him. He hath grown used to missing thy face from his world; he chafeth, he bestirreth himself. Well, naught may come of it; but if it have results, thou wilt mayhap remember that I offered thee service. And I, it is possible, may have then forgotten that when I did so thou saidst unto me, 'Serpent!' Yet I call thee a rash lady," he added in a more natural voice, swift and bitter, "an ignorant, unused girl, to say that thou hast endured already the worst—"

What more he may have spoken was drowned in the blare of horns, the approaching tramp of hoofs up the rocky road, a command given in a shout by Ulf.

Theodolind and Cynric leaned over to see far below the confused movement of the earls returning.

Cynric took his leave.

From the end of the hall, where she sat spinning among the women, the queen looked at the faces of Ulf's sons to see if these might tell her anything of

the Horteweining's fate. She argued well from their frank good-humor toward their father, and from their total carelessness of herself.

They had had good sport. In a corner as they entered they had flung down the wolves slain that day. The light was reflected dimly here and there on a glassy eye, a row of sharp teeth, and caught darkly by the narrow stream that crept from under the heavy heap.

Stuf alone of the men made not merry, who had not been forth with the others. He had placed himself near the blazing hearth, and stooped moping, with his head bent and his hair falling over his face, shivering in spite of the great heat. His wounds were afflicting him. He had repulsed Theodolind when she craved to ease him.

Through the noise of rough table-talk, she heard him suddenly cry out and curse when he attempted to shift his position. She moved softly toward him, murmuring, "Let me help thee," and laid her hand on his feverish arm.

He started angrily to draw it back; but the hand felt so gratefully soft and cool, he eyed her suspiciously, then suddenly without a word bared his hurt side to her, and surrendered his aching limb. Deftly she ministered to him.

She had but returned to her place and resumed her distaff, thinking a good thought of big-bodied, ungracious Stuf, when a great commotion, and Ulf's furious voice rising over all, stopped her breathing. He was rating the keeper of his dogs for the death of a boar-hound he loved.

"Ha! I tell thee that the blame is thine!" he roared, rising and upsetting his settle, while he brought down his fist so that the ale splashed from the flagons. "A dog dieth not of so little. He had but a small hurt from a young boar's tusk. Thou hast given him no water, or thou hast neglected to give him meat, or thou hast given him overmuch meat. Ha! my brave brindled hound! used no better than a churl's mongrel cur! Ha! but thou shalt answer for it. I valued him more than I do thee, and I will prove him that on thy body. Thou shalt hang,—nay, thou shalt be flayed!"

Theodolind had risen, trembling. Each burst of his voice was like a blow. She had never seen the king like that,—never so unreasonable, so unjust. He was not cruel habitually to his own men.

Even the earls seemed to feel a novelty in this: consternation was painted on their faces; they were gloomily silent. Eadel frowned in disapproval at his father, moving uneasily as if making ready to oppose him.

The keeper, an old man, was ashen with fear, and trembled visibly.

Another storm of words broke from Ulf. It seemed almost as if he were lashing himself into this unnatural fury, or that he were gone mad.

Theodolind, looking amazedly from him to the offending old man, caught Cynric's eye. She could not fail to see that his glance was full of significance, but she did not understand.

"Drag him forth!" shouted Ulf. "Whip him instantly till his wrinkled hide drop off him—" But

Theodolind had fallen at his feet and clasped his knees with her arms, imploring, and not to be thrown off.

A vague hope made eager the old man's terrified face. The king had squared himself in his chair, with the pale queen at his feet.

One day, not long after the keeper-of-hounds' return to favor, Cynric witnessed a thing such as he had never seen happen before.

In the hottest excitement of the chase, when the enormous mother-boar brought to bay had turned upon her assailants, and the dogs rushed against her with yells, he saw Ulf abruptly turn his back on the beloved sport, and plunge into the forest.

He reasoned rapidly, and followed in his footsteps.

The king crashed through the underbrush, with lifted arms snapping the interfering boughs, tearing down the wild linking vines; now ducking to clear a slanting tree-bole; where he could not, overleaping it.

Cynric kept him in view.

Long the two travelled, yet made not much road by reason of the many obstacles.

Ulf came to the spot where a dark stream was gathered in a deep basin. He stopped, measured it with his eye, and sprang to the farther bank.

Cynric, reaching it, felt himself insufficient, and was vexed at thought of now losing sight of the king.

But hazard favored him: Ulf went no farther.

The light thiere was peculiarly soft and cool, falling through the thinned roof of leaves that screened the stream. The sun sparsely strewed the bronze mirror

with winking golden eyes. There was a good smell of wet moss from the stones that edged the water ; a soothing gurgling sound from beyond the point where the great trunk of a lightning-smitten tree had dammed in the flood.

Ulf threw back his head and sniffed the dead-leaf-scented air. Then he flung himself down by the stream on a bed of leaves centuries deep, with his arm over a gray rock. In so doing he saw Cynric.

“I too be weary and heated,” said the latter ; “I too would fain sleep through the noontide.” And he stretched himself on the opposite side of the stream, composing his arms under his head.

Ulf looked at him through his eyebrows, and said nothing. He rolled over upon his broad back, with his spear and silver horn beside him, and lay looking upward, in the trees whose tops were far, far removed from their gnarled roots.

Now and then a little creature ran along a bough, leaped to another, and vanished in the hushed gloom. Winged beings glistened for a moment, sapphire and ruby, as they happened to cross a shaft of sunshine, then seemed to have melted away. Far up in the air a few twigs caught the uninterrupted sun : they flickered a burning green, and made everything else dim as a dream.

After long remaining motionless, Ulf with a short, thick sigh, as if impatient of a burden on his breast, moved on to his side, propped his head on his hand, the tawny locks flowing through his fingers over his wrist, and watched his companion.

Cynric slept.

Ulf bent over the water, and looked musingly at himself. His leonine head was reflected clearly and darkly on the glassy, gliding plane. Thoughtfully he smoothed out with his hand the stern furrows on his brow. He stooped lower curiously to examine how silver began to streak the hair on his temples.

He lay back again against the rock; and as he pillow'd his head on his arm, something in the hand that fell under his eyes seemed to strike him.

He held it up and looked, opening and closing it, making the sinews stand out. It was large and hard and rough. A young tree stood in reach. Cynric heard a ripping sound, lifted his head, and saw how Ulf without moving from his reclining posture uprooted the sapling.

“Such strength is good!” he commented, nodding, with his courtier smile.

Ulf looked at him again through his eyebrows and said nothing, but glanced sheepishly at his big shapely hand and down his mighty bulk.

After another space of staring up into the trees, he spoke, as if to himself, with the frown he wore when pondering some difficult question: “Wherfore good? What can it do? Yea, I know: it can seize, and hold fast,—crush,” he proceeded, with a sort of exasperation, “hurt, slay,—what more? What can it gain for me but to make me dreaded? How would it avail me, I pray thee, with that painted thing?” He pointed at a flashing, blue-mailed creature that hung poised in a sunbeam. “I can catch it and hold it struggling, and end its pretty life 'twixt thumb and

finger; that is all. I could by no means woo it to settle on my hand of itself, and let me have joy of its dainty form."

He watched the ethereal insect with an expression at once of pleasure and displeasure, until it had darted away. Then he remained gazing where it had been with eyes that looked strangely in his conqueror's head, — eyes undangerous, almost wistful, full of quiet sylvan reflections.

"Just the body, — it giveth me just the body!" he slowly, dreamily grumbled. "That I can imprison, compel, make cringe. I can teach it every pang, make it fear and loathe me. But while I have my will easily of the frail, helpless clay, that which smileth, that which answereth back, which dwelleth deep in the beaming eye, shall set me at naught. That goeth whither it listeth, that swingeth itself up beyond my reach, and mocketh at me from among the icy stars. Over that I have no power, — not though I could uproot all these."

He moved uneasily, as if a thorn were rankling in his flesh; his head sank between his shoulders, his face clouded over.

Cynric watched him in mingled contempt and respect, much as if he were looking on a sick lion.

"Scorn not thy strength," he said finally; "it hath availed thee much with men."

"Who spoke of women?" growled the king, angrily looking up.

"Nay, none. I but thought in reference to thy strength of one to whom thou hast of late conceded many things when she sued for them. Remember

the Horteweining. Without thy power to hurt, couldst thou have made good thy right to spare?"

"Gifts had I too to give,—good acres and gold," muttered Ulf; and to Cynric was explained the docility of the athelings on a remembered occasion. "Gold,—land," pursued the king, his brow darkening at a memory. "And what have they bought me? What but—" He checked himself, becoming mindful of Cynric's curious attention, and finished his musings along that line within his head.

"But that is at an end," he exclaimed at last, starting up with the lavish display of strength of one ashamed of a weakness; and he waved his arms as a man fighting with a swarm of goading insects. "I have enough of being wept over with an end in view. I am by nature, thou knowest, not soft of heart, and this thing hath ceased to be good sport. Nay, I grant nothing more for all the tears that be!"

"Thy resolution, I think, will be shortly sorely tested," said Cynric.

Ulf looked him fixedly between the eyes.

"It was to tell thee somewhat I followed thee here. Be not angry if it like thee not, remembering that I speak but as duty to my king would have me. There were men taken yesterday—"

"I know what thou wouldest tell me. They be Gortimer's men,—spies. They perish. The ancient wolf hath grown him new fangs, and whetteth them. Yet he will not dare much, I trow, while his child lieth under my thumb."

"Nay, thou sayest wisely as ever. But seemeth it to thee impossible that these men, whereof one—I

have it from good source, the maid Ursula told me privily, who recognized his face, having known him of old — canst thou doubt that these, one among whom was less than a year gone the lover of Theodolind and her promised lord, were bringing her a warning and help to flee ? ”

“ Ha ! ” roared the king.

“ Then spoke the hero, the leader of men : Narrow is this land for my desires ; cramped is my big spirit. Every weary blade of green my foot hath trod ; every tree I once have seen. Seek we broader acres, O my fellows, where the breast can freely swell, and the eye rove like an eagle. Then loosed they the great sea-steeds, gave them bridle. The hoarse gray sea writhed in his wrath. The sea-steeds, the strong-winded, bravely galloped, straining up the slippery, crumbling glass-hills, the tumultuous water-mountains. Saw the hero in the pale-red daybreak white shores gleaming, white as milk-curd. Cried the leader to his warriors : Behold the land I promised to my faithful ! But there be work for keen-edged axes ere we shall wash our hands in fair well-water. Take each man his good crest-crasher ; the wolves shall have hot meat.”

The singer stopped to moisten his throat and breathe himself, before rehearsing the battle that ensued, when Sagfrith, Ulf’s renowned father, set foot on land.

The earls listened with never completely dulled emotion to the oft-heard tale of carnage, unable to repress a battle-cry now and then when the onset of armed men was described. Some of the older men nodded excitedly, frequently saying to the

younger, “It was so, I can swear, for I myself was there !”

When he had finished, the singer gave the harp into the hands of his neighbor.

Cynric felt the strings reflectively a moment without rousing them to sound, while the earls composed themselves to hear. His abstracted, roving eye lighted a moment, casually, on the queen.

She sat spinning. None of the women gathered about her spun so untiringly as she, who never stopped, as did the others, to bestow a moment’s attention on any of the guests. Her eyes were lowered, her face a blank.

He glanced swiftly at the king. Ulf leaned back, gazing up among the rafters; so he had been sitting since the harp resounded, forgetting to drink.

Cynric smote the strings softly, and thereupon sang in the manner of another people than these, to whom blows were at once work and pastime. He had learned in a sunnier land to utter more soothing songs. His voice was high and ripe,—truly a pleasant gift of Nature,—evoking a golden atmosphere about the sensitive listener’s thought, pressing insistently on the deep source of tears.

“The wind is now sweet and warm as breath of kine; the smell of the early rose is blown abroad from the garden. Now, since the leaves are grown thick to shelter the nests from rain, pair the feathered hosts of the wood. Upon the hills there is no vestige left of that white shield the crocus bold had to pierce with his blue spear. The wayfarer, whom weariness overtakes, may lie upon a bed of primroses, diversified with little violets.

“It is the season when the blooming youth cannot withhold his feet, but they will lead him where maidens are assembled bleaching linen, or playing lightly with the bounding ball. He spieth shyly through the blossoming branches ; then walketh lonely, sighing at a vision.

“Now in his frozen bosom who hath lost a tender mate, his sorrow waketh newly, as putteth forth the hoary bark new leaves.

“Now they who may not love but it is disaster, in treacherous dreams begotten of the spring, do feed their eyes on a forbidden face, and moan in slumber, waking to find the pillow damp with tears.”

Theodolind’s hands, like those of the other women, had become listless at their spinning ; she fingered the implements mechanically, looking fixedly over and beyond Cynric’s head, — seeing no one might know what vision there, — unconscious of herself as of her lord, who was watching her unfairly through fingers that made a feint to shield his eyes from the light.

So absorbed she was, she did not start for a moment, even slightly, when a face filled the vacant space at which she was staring, — no more than as if that face had been a part of her dream.

The door at the farther end of the hall had opened quietly while Cynric still sang, and a man had entered preceded and followed by a handful of Ulf’s men-of-arms bearing pikes. The lights bent and flared a moment in the gust, then burned brighter, showing a stranger’s face.

He was in the first flower of manhood, of com-

manding height and princely carriage, yet light and slender of shape. His lip and cheek were clothed as with golden light. His features, of a type that distinguished him from the rugged occupants of the hall, were informed with a noble and proud beauty; his steadfast eyes expressed at the same time scorn and patience. The dark-red, close-fitting tunic that he wore was delicately stitched with small gold lilies; his gold-studded belt supported an empty dirk-sheath.

He moved up the hall between his guards with measured tread, casting his eye calmly over the company.

Cynric had not ceased singing. As he passed behind him, the prisoner caught sight of a pale face softly staring at him from the side where the women sat, with the sad, tender eye he knew. His foot faltered; he paused, suddenly gone pale himself.

On the queen's awakening face then grew a look that those who beheld it were haunted by through weary years.

The young man's hesitation lasted only for the space of a lightning-flash. He averted his face, frozen and still, and passed on.

Theodolind's eyes followed him, fascinated, horror-struck.

But when she saw him bent toward the door that led to the mysterious depths of the castle, she could no more. She staggered to her feet, and would have shrieked his name, but only a broken gasp reached the air,—“Arthur!” For even as the door fell heavily to, Ulf had leaped to his wife's side. She had a

brief, terrible vision of a face breathing hard into her face ; blazing, pitiless eyes pressing, searching into her own ; a confused thought that Stuf and Cynric, kind souls, would not wish to see her ill-used ; then a moment of insufferable anguish, and black night overcame her.

And for this man she would not once lift her voice in intercession ?

That question Cynric put to himself a hundred times during the space of three days allowed Arthur to reflect if he would confess Gortiner's connivance in his coming.

As the hours of Arthur's life grew fewer, Cynric asked it with a sort of impatience, almost indignation, and felt an inexplicable discomfit increasing about his centre of consciousness. Was it that he felt defrauded ?

The queen, the distributer of bread, moved about her duties as before. She made no attempt at speech with the king. As he never lost trace of the one or the other, Cynric was assured of that.

For this man alone, who had loved her, would she not intercede, — she whose voice had sometimes won grace for a common wretch condemned to die ? What was the secret of her silence ? He could not hold himself from once more searching her expressionless face to see if he might not discover. In that moment it was revealed to him. Had he, indeed, supposed that she was making no appeal ? The more doltish his judgment ! It was with those speaking eyes she did her pleading.

Then he watched her constantly, in that way he had, without directly looking or seeming to see.

He perceived how her insistent glance dogged Ulf's, imploring ever, more than if she had been prone before him with her forehead on his feet.

The king could not look up from the floor, which in the mood now on him he studied at length, but he met her eyes, and they began their despairing prayer, like those of a dumb, drowning creature. If he did not at once withdraw his own, nor gather his brows in the forbidding folds that came so easy to them, they stole nearer a little, encouraged ; it seemed almost as if the parted lips were about to speak, — but they did not.

The king lived his usual life, with a black frown thereto added, and an unaccustomed, ugly suddenness of temper that made his people look to their ways. To his wife he spoke never a word. But it was perceived by one who watched him keenly — Cynric — that he now and then would turn his eyes on her reluctantly, as if compelled to it. Then would be renewed that mute argument of hers. Ulf's face hardened : he would seem to his spy trying to beat back and break her glance on the steely anger of his own ; then suddenly sometimes he looked away almost as if putting up a shield, taking flight.

It was in the cold first glimmer of dawn Ulf woke with a sick start from leaden sleep succeeding long hours of waking, — woke with a sense that the eyes were again with him. They seemed to pierce through the gloom, and find him there disarmed. His hands were weak as water ; he could not control the mo-

tious of his blood. He held his breath; he remembered—and seemed to remember not with the spirit only, but with every fibre of his thrilled frame—a night not long gone when he had dreamed of a cold bird dropping against his breast. If again— His heart beat thick; the blood surged fiery in his eyelids. He felt strangely, recklessly ready for a moment to do whatever a small chill hand laid on his own should desire of him. There was no stir, but a sound of the wind rising outside. He strained his eyes to explore the shade; his breast ached with the long-pent breath. He saw nothing, yet was unmanned by the sense of a presence. He did not move, to find if a hand would not suddenly touch him, and a voice say in a whisper his name. As he gazed he thought—yet was never sure—there rose, without a sound, from the floor a black, formless, misty shadow; lifted its arms on high, wringing them, and melted away, while the wind gave a shudder. The king ground his teeth, battling to repossess himself, hardening again his melting heart, cursing it and the night and dreams.

So the third day dawned, and wore to its close.

The queen found herself sitting at her usual place in the hall, in sight of the men at their evening meal, with the familiar faces of her companions about her, distaff and spindle in her hands.

She spun, but not so steadily as once; her hands would drop on her lap, and lie palms upward for minutes, while she looked one after another in all the faces present. No help in any of them. They were as uncaring of her as ever; they could laugh in such an hour,—those, too, to whom she had sought

to do some little good. Then she remembered that these men were not likely to be aware of her grievous trouble. They could know nothing more than that one of her race lay in danger. Would she have suffered so much for just a countryman? Ulf knew; his face had said so plainly enough in that terrible hour. And probably Cynric. Yes, he avoided her eye. There was a distant sort of consolation at this moment — when her grief seemed to have spent itself and to lie dazed, so that she could think clearly and observe almost indifferently — in the thought that they did not know. The bitter world would have seemed by so much bitterer if she had had to believe that Stuf, for instance, whose face for an instant had looked gratitude and respect into hers, could appear like that — contented, lazy — while she was proving a thousand agonies. If, now, she were to confess to Stuf and implore his aid, could he do aught in her cause? She considered the question calmly, and on reflection set it aside. She looked then at the face next to his, asking herself the same question concerning it, perceiving with a clearness of judgment that had come to her only since the nerves of pain were so deadened.

At last she looked at Cynric. This man could perhaps be of use; but she had once called him serpent, and he had promised to remember. Oh, if it were possible to efface the impression of that cruel, impatient word! She had thought often since, in the still hour when she arraigned her conscience, how she had no right to judge him at any time; he had acted according to other lights than hers, and

she might by a gentle word have turned away hate that injured his soul. But she had not found the humility to express her regret; she had been proud, obstinate, and much to blame. And now—oh, if he might but be generous to her in her extreme need! The power to suffer that three days of anguish seemed to have utterly killed, regained a fluttering existence from this spark of hope.

Cynric looked over at her, answering her mute summons. She could not know what he saw to shake him so.

Cynric looked up, and was smitten by a thought foreign to all that he knew of himself. Never before had she referred to him; she had not seemed since that evening on the tower to know that he lived. Now she turned to him for assistance; she trusted him to have forgiven her. Her face was such that he felt no triumph in her defeat. Is that a thing to persecute? said his new thought. And in the revulsion of feeling wrought in this cynic by the first glance he had had from her that was not cold or simply unseeing, he fell to wondering tumultuously why he had hated and sought to do her harm. He had feared lest, grown in credit, she should expose his ambitious and disloyal dreams. Yet, so gentle, so strong a creature, suffering all things, living out daily that strange gospel of her faith that bade render good for evil! How—how to undo what was done? His thought beat swiftly at every door of help. He blanched; he looked at her with an expression of unfeigned dismay, and bent his eyes elsewhere, become cowardly.

“ He meaneth,” said Theodolind to herself, falling from that last hope and lapsing again into dull insensibility, “ that he would help me if he dared. But he is afraid,—afraid lest his power not being sufficient, he should altogether lose it. God reward him; he is a prudent man.”

Only the cumbrous being at the head of the board could help her.

She considered him coldly, impersonally, as never before, and calculated again the chances of a spoken petition to him, taking fully into account his barbarous passions. She feared him,—oh, she feared him! Why did he hate Arthur more than another foe? Not for love of herself. Yet she could not doubt that rage and jealousy had burned in his eye when he stopped her from crying out. Ah, God! it was his brutish nature that took on easily all harsh, wild feelings. It was his tiger’s play. It had been sport before to make her beg for men’s lives; now it was but crueler sport to see how he could frighten a creature who had never done him wrong, so that for the man whose life was dearest she dare not pray. And she had hoped good for this monster’s soul. She had thought to redeem him, forgetting to hate him as was proper for her father’s sake, seeing in him only a human soul that must not be let to so burden itself with crimes that it could never see God. She had been true to him from the hour of entering under his roof, having renounced herself, closed the past in a secret chamber of her heart not to be gazed on wilfully again,—only in treacherous dreams sometimes revisited.

It seemed to her that she had asked so little of life since the day she came to these halls. She had thought that she asked nothing for herself whatever but patience and the power still to do a little good in this disastrous earthly prison-house. But, then, she had not contemplated this chance. She had thought nevermore until the eternal day had dawned for them both to look upon the face that had once so sweetly glowed through all her meditations. She had believed that the worst was endured when she took leave of it. And he should find the eternal day to-morrow. But before that, the pain of death to be passed in the full vigor of healthy manhood,—Christ! the human heart is not framed to endure the thought of painful death to those it loves; and again her heart began its agonized struggles against it.

Oh, that Ulf! that Ulf! She had an impulse to cast herself before him, and vent her trepidation in headlong supplications. He might know that at his feet was a miserable woman praying for her lover's life. Such an object deserved pity. Pity! A vision of a mutilated face rose before her. It was that had, at every impulse to speak, given her pause. No physical dishonor had so far been laid upon the noble body of Arthur. But such a face she had seen on an enemy taken captive by Ulf, also a person unable to resist. There was no pity anywhere, on earth or in heaven, she thought irresponsibly, her soul smitten with utter blindness. Then the charitable vesture that, in a holy thirst to find each God-made thing a little worthy of love or pity, she had been long weav-

ing about all the persons and objects in that hall, dropped into tatters. She saw them in a lurid light that showed them to her in every detail sordid, monstrous, loathsome. How had she, nurtured in a noble palace, among men whose words and deeds were those of dignity, been able to endure these in patience,—these barbarians, lower than brutes ! There flashed through all her veins the mad desire for power to blot them from the face of the earth. And taking up her spinning, she spun diligently, feeling confusely that in a world where none had care or pity, one might as well spin. Nothing mattered much in such a world.

At last, in the stillness of midnight, she found herself alone in the small stone chamber high in the turret where she came to pray. In a hollow of the wall stood a rough stone cross, secretly hewn for her there. A lamp burned dimly. She dropped before the symbol, and clasping her hands about it, bent her face on her arms, faint and dizzy with fasting and lack of sleep, stupid with grief.

She began praying wanderingly, mixing her imperious demand for justice, for a miracle, with humble pleas for patience, forgiveness, and grace to forgive,—falling, in mere exhaustion of spirit, from her passionate conjurations to disconnected, helpless telling over to herself a golden time, blessed, before these crosses; recalling glimpses of summer woods where the condemned man had ridden with her, May in their hearts; impressions of things seen and felt together: glittering musters of knights,—stars coming out above them, sitting

side by side, unreproved, in her father's house ; the feel of his hand, the way of his familiar speech ; then brought back to thought of the horror impending, fervently beseeching God for him and for herself.

At last, as morning neared, it seemed that God had heard : a strange comfort came to her, a sense of exaltation that lifted her beyond the morrow. From the shadowy corners faces looked down on her, each set in its tremulous glory,—compassionate, courage-giving, tranquillizing faces of many who had long overcome pain ; smells of Paradise, incense and lilies, filled all the cold, dark place, crept through her brain, numbing it to human fears. She lay long rapt in a vision. Softly her hands loosened, slipped. She bent upon herself before the stone altar, and lay motionless.

A maid found her so. She stooped, frightened, and with many pains roused her. The newly risen sun flung through the narrow chink of the window a bar of yellow light across her robe. She smiled faintly, dazzled, as she opened her eyes. Then she sat up, gently rubbing her forehead ; and as she came to herself, there grew again in her face the white fixed look it had worn when she looked on the vision.

She took up early her station at the window commanding the court through which it was known that the spy must pass. The window was high. She prayed a maid push a stool under it, and stood on the raised place looking through the bars, careless that her face should be seen of all ; as if scornful of

appearances, grown so bold as to have no desire further to conceal from the husband the face of a wife whose lover is about to die. Yet it was not boldness: only, her brain seemed to have limited its functions to framing a single thought.

Ulf did not approach the window; but from his post on the hearth with the dogs cast now and then from under his bent brows a glance toward Theodolind.

A feeling of constraint prevailed among the earls. All felt something impending; all had been conscious of a heaviness in the air these last few days, and knew not for what to be prepared. A man, it was supposed an emissary of the queen's father, was to die that morning by the king's command: stern passions must play about that issue. They looked from the queen's colorless, waiting face to the king's, which wore an expression not seen on it by them before, of overwrought attention, repression; and one by one they went from the hall, until few persons were left in it.

Ulf watched the queen now unswervingly:

The starved outline of her motionless face showed rigidly clear against the light. It was a face that smote the beholder, that unavoidably brought up an image of what it must have been under less ill-starred conditions,— how singularly sweet to look upon, with ever so little a smile to quicken that ghostly suggestion of a long-disused dimple, with health and hope and natural joys to flush and round out that untimely aged cheek.

Once and twice the king made a step toward her,

then stopped, and drew back to his place, moving restlessly.

Now there rose a murmur, a scuffling in the court. It grew. It told him that Arthur had appeared. He watched the queen tremulously. A smile distorted his mouth.

Theodolind pressed her sharp face to the bars a moment, every tense line giving witness of the supreme reaching out of the spirit, her eyes widened by an effort that completely ringed the intent gray iris with white. Then, suddenly, while he with hands involuntarily outheld was breathlessly expecting, he saw her withdraw with a start, catching at the iron, her head with its harvest of pale hair bent backward over her shoulders, the face a moment before stonily calm, frowning, convulsed. She hung so a breathing-while, swaying, and her grasp loosened.

He had reached her with a bound, and received the light body in his arms.

He was himself laughing in a strange, shaken way, and speaking with a tongue almost unintelligible, while his whole great body trembled with the effort to control himself from crushing the slight form he held savagely, insanely, against his breast.

“Dost not see?” he blundered. “He goeth free! Understandest? Free! Yet indeed thou shouldst have asked me, knowing all I would do for thy sake. Shalt reward me a little for this, sweet one, for never before was conquered so mad a thirst for man’s blood.”

She lay impassive, unresisting, like a child across his arms; her sweet gold head meekly pillow'd on

his neck among rough, red locks ; her hands hanging, without will ; her lips open, her eyes showing a leaden gleam between the drooping lashes.

“ Speak ! ” Ulf said, shaking her in his passion no more roughly than he could help, yet imperiously, “ Thank me ! O heart of my heart, white bird, snow-flower, wilt not say a little word ? ”

“ Fool ! ” cried out hard at his side Cynric, gray in the face, finding it relief to dare the worst in turning all his bitter rage toward himself and the world against his master, “ Ass ! Ruffian ! Art satisfied ? Thou hast done her to death ! ”

Ulf deigned no answer, did not look round, pushed him aside, and again spoke to Theodolind, as softly as he might, ordering her to answer him. Then again he shook her, violently this time ; and then still more violently.

Afterward, with a sudden subjugation of spirit and signal loss of color in his lips, having approached his mouth to hers so that the faintest breath might be felt, he held his own breath, and for a long, long moment was absolutely still, ghastly, waiting for a sign.

And Cynric was still as he.

And presently Cynric echoed the hoarse cry that escaped his king, and shuddering and sickening and cursing, cast himself forward to the body that Ulf with an abrupt, mad gesture had let drop from his arms heavily down on the ringing stone.

Then was seen the wily courtier on his knees, sobbing tearlessly, and with an unsteady hand striving to compose the features of Theodolind, to smooth

away from them the unbearable look of reproach and horror that death was fixing there,—as if in so doing he might efface his own remorse.

He stopped short in his pious task, unstrung, quivering, making himself small, at the blast of a voice outside in the court, more like the bellow of a wounded bull than anything human,—

“Seize him again, seize him! Kill him! kill, kill, kill! Hurry him off the battlements, that he dash down from crag to crag, into the torrent,—down! down!”

SERVIROL.

SERVIROL.

TWO weary gentlemen warmed themselves at the fire in the forester's hut, and in the intervals between their doses contemplated each other.

Each felt a sleepy interest in a man so different from himself.

When the gentleman who lay on the floor with his shoulders raised by an old portmanteau burst in several places, and his legs spread wide, was brought back to consciousness by the disagreeable sensation of heat in his right side, or the sharpened activity of the downpour on the roof, his eyes for a few seconds wandered puzzled over the black figure in the chair opposite and above him. Ten years before he had known a face like that; but ten years must work changes in a face: this one seemed to him still too youthful to belong to the man he had known.

It was a long, delicately thin face, the noble structure of the bone just indicating itself under the smooth-shaven, pale-bronze skin. Everything in it while it reposed drooped a little,—the line of the black eyebrows fell at the corners; the aquiline nose curved over the almost womanish downward-arching mouth; the long, black locks hung straight and soft as willow-leaves over the forehead and cheeks.

It was a face just vaguely touched with beauty, and conveying at once even in sleep an impression of austerity and sweetness. The character of the young man's head was in a measure carried out in his body leaning back in the high wooden elbow-chair, with shapely legs outstretched and crossed, and high-bred brown hands hanging out across the arm-rests. It was slender and lightly built, yet not suggestive of weakness; rather of a delicate hardihood,—constitutional gracility, perhaps, overcome by simple and wholesome living.

The man on the floor let his eye run curiously over the other's garments,—still in the fashion of the last reign, as the long hair and smooth cheek. He felt superior amusement at the coarse black woollen tunic and hose, the rough creamy linen of the shirt against which the hanging head looked so brown, the mantle of primitive cut thrown over a stool to dry and steaming quietly before the fire.

But he could not observe long enough to conjecture more than a very little; a languor bred by his ride, by the heat after a drenching, the long drink after drought, as well as a beginning of fever in his veins, soon weighed down his eyelids; and he slept with his head thrown back over the sum of his worldly possessions, breathing hard, and occasionally grunting with a dreamy realization of various discomforts.

Then perhaps the horses stamping under the shed outside, or the muddy white hound yapping impatiently when he had stretched his shaggy legs too near to the blaze and it scorched him, roused the man in

the chair to take a few minutes' further survey of the stranger at his feet.

The face awakened in him no memory of any one seen before, but brought to his mind effigies of a well-known personage. The reflection of the fire kindled a sunny color in the sleeper's short, curly beard and on his solid, close-cropped round head, smooth as a gilt morion. His rather large face with the upward-slanting line of the eye, the nose broad of nostril and thick at the base, the full underlip, gave one to think that its waking expression might be one of not ill-natured irony combined with boldness.

The stranger's clothes — originally rich and showy in the extreme — were sorely weather-stained, frayed in many places, and splashed with mud. His doublet and trunks were of the finest velvet, at one time green, elaborately slashed in every part with satin, once of a warm rose-color. His open coat was edged with dark fur, and boasted still a battered gold clasp. The hat that lay on the floor beside his long sword was a broad round thing of velvet adorned with feathers, — the saddest-looking feathers, dingy and wet and straggling.

The man looked ill. From the fit of his garments one would have judged his powerfully built, soldierly body to have lost in size since the day of their glory. His face was pale under its coat of sunburn ; now and then it twitched in his sleep.

The man in the chair, at last feeling sufficiently restored, sat up and looked toward the window. The rain was still falling, but less violently ; such gray light as could reach the interior of the hut through

the trees and the dull little window was beginning to fail. While in thought he was going over the miles still dividing him from home, he perceived his neighbor's respiration becoming decidedly more subdued. He turned to him, and met the glance of his opening eyes.

The prostrate man looked in silence awhile; then half smiled and said audibly, yet as if saying it to himself, "Etienne de Servirol! Etienne de Servirol!"

The black-clad gentleman smiled in response, and stared frankly in the other's face, plainly with the endeavor to recognize him.

"You know my name, Monsieur. We have met?"

"Met? We've been even friends,—even enemies. I think, indeed, we have enough of the same blood to be able to call ourselves kinsmen."

"Now that you speak, I seem to feel that you are not a stranger. Yet, I hope you will pardon me, your name does not offer itself. May I not try to make my stupidity just conceivable to myself by supposing that you have greatly changed?"

"It is likely, very likely. But you—you have not changed. Until you awoke I could almost have believed that the last ten years had not been."

"Ten years," mused Servirol, with speculative eyes on his neighbor's face. "What was I doing ten years ago?"

Then it flashed upon him. He leaped to his feet and seized the other's hand, extorting from him an irrepressible howl and shudder of pain, which, however,

turned into a forced laugh as Servirol precipitately retreating let him go.

"Nothing,—or not much. It opened again while I was riding. I got it long ago. Every now and then it becomes as good as new. Never mind."

Servirol, after hesitating over tenders of help, feeling that his friend would for the moment prefer it so, refrained from making any reference to his wound; he took his seat again, eying him with a sympathy he could not conceal.

"Then it has dawned on you who I am. Well, who am I?"

"Oh, I make no mistake now, André. You are not so much changed, after all. It was your beard and your hair."

"The absence of my hair, you mean."

"As you will. But excuse me, my dear friend, are you not suffering? I fear you are," said Servirol, uneasy with compassion. "Pray do not be proud with an old playmate. Can I not assist you? Without modesty, I am deaf at dressing a hurt."

André waived him off with a smile, to all seeming perfectly unconcerned.

"Let be; it does not matter. I laid myself down here because there was more room. I can sit up well enough." And before Servirol could effectively oppose himself, André, without a catching of the breath, had got to his feet, and stood before him in the attitude of a gallant gentleman on whom is fixed the attention of many beautiful ladies. He looked strong enough then, and even elegant in his faded finery. He squared his shoulders with a brave,

careless air, threw back his head with a light-hearted swagger, and unceremoniously dropped upon the seat across which the other man's cloak had been drying. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and scanned Servirol's face with his much-knowing blue eyes.

"How did you do it, man, to stay so young ? If you had become a priest, as I thought you would have long done — But you are evidently no priest. How did your projects come to fail, may one hear ? I never knew a man more bent upon cutting himself off from every chance of enjoyment — call it sinful pleasure if you prefer — than you once were. Ah, but that was long ago ! Now, perhaps — perhaps — "

"I am even married !" laughed Servirol. "I will tell you ; but first let me hear about yourself. What good wind brings you in these parts ?"

André shrugged his shoulders, and spoke like a person lip-deep in misfortunes, but who does not care to be bothered with thinking about them.

"Here or there, it does not much matter now. I can't fight with an accursed hole interfering with my sword-play. Besides, — though it seems a detail without importance so late in the time of the world, — at the moment I should be embarrassed to know for whom to be fighting, and against whom. My royal brother-at-arms in captivity ; his royal mother, for bad reasons of her own, no friend to me, — in fact almost seeming to view my person with antipathy, — I seem to see long leisure stretching out before me. I thought I should like to do a few of the things one is always wishing he had time for ; for one, to re-

visit the haunts of my extreme youth,— it is thought to be a touching performance, and to afford the most arid soul some degree of comfort,— to see again old friendly faces— ”

“But you knew,” interrupted Servirol,— “surely you had been informed — ”

“Of the poverty I am reduced to in the way of kinsfolk and everything else that one has without working? Yes; still, I thought I might meet some one who remembered me; and you see I was not to be disappointed.”

“Ah, had you thought of me ?” inquired Servirol, holding out his hand with a grateful impulse.

André wondered why he showed pleasure, but took the hand, replying without embarrassment: “Frankly, I had not with any degree of precision formulated the thought of seeking you out. Still, I knew your whereabouts. It was among the chances that we should fall in with each other.”

“You must come and make our roof yours, while your wound is closing,” said Servirol, whose large-orbed, mild-looking eye took in more than the other thought apparent. André could not imagine himself a painful object behind his smiles and his indifference, nor know how the rich misery of his apparel roused pity in the man whose orderly simplicity quickened mockery in himself. “I will not allow you to refuse. I claim the right to take possession of you as seventh cousin, if old friend is not sufficient.”

“Oh, I was not thinking of a refusal,” replied André, with cool ease. It seemed as if an unex-

pected prospect of peace made all his muscles relax ; a warmth passed through his pale face, and he looked simpler, better-natured than before. "It is kind of you, though," he owned aloud, in spite of himself ; "for I am an incumbrance now. I am scarcely amusing. I am a trifle broken in health, I confess ; I need not say, in fortune. But Fortune is a lady, my dear sir," he added in brighter tones. "If I show a sufficient contempt for her, she will come back, if only to see what manner of man it is who could, without one sign of agitation, resign her most esteemed favors. She is a woman,—yes ; and so — bound to change !

*'Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol qui s'y fie,'"*

he lightly sang.

"But, ah, I believe you told me you were married ?" he said, cutting short the song, as he saw in Servirol's face no true appreciation of the sentiment it expressed. "You look appropriately prosperous and well nourished. Have you been married long ?"

"Not long, no."

"Do you know, frankly, I cannot become used to the idea ? In the old days you were so — excuse me for the expression — thin-blooded. You lived with your head in the clouds ; you had no eyes but for holy books. I thought you despised the fair ones."

"Oh, no ; never that ! God forbid I should have been such a poor creature ! I only did not know," said Servirol, warmly. "But if I had been an unbeliever, my wife is fit to convert the most obdurate."

“Beautiful?”

“Oh, beautiful and good,—most perfectly sweet and good! But beautiful, as you asked it first, must have seemed to you first in importance. And so it is: because perfection of beauty in the face cannot but be an expression, an emblem, of the heart’s beauty. You will be impressed, I cannot doubt, with the loveliness that breathes in my dear lady’s every line, every gesture, every glance.”

It came back to André, as a forgotten tune is revived when one bar of it is heard again, that also in the old times this was one of Servirol’s traits,—to open his heart freely to the first-comer, endowing him with every gift of the good listener,—charity, understanding, discretion. No wonder the man had kept young, with that trusting spirit! André could not help an amused contempt at him. At the same time he wondered what the woman could be like whom a Servirol should so praise. He, André, had seen the great and shining beauties of the day; he might boast of knowing what beauty was. The picture he made to himself of his friend’s lady bore no relation to those much-besung ones of the court he loved; his imagination sketched him something simple, raw, ordinary, beneath his own educated attention.

“Fitly she is called Aurore; for she seems made of like elements with the dawn,—pearl and rose-color, and dew, and soft light, and pure gold,” said Servirol, unconsciously using caressing intonations as he spoke of his lady. “I thank God that I found her! Else I should have died ignorant of this world’s best happiness.”

" You would have, perhaps, married some other," remarked André.

Servirol blushed dark. " I think not." He then added with simple sincerity: " At least I hope not. Yet I will not conceal from you that already before I had the blessedness to see her, the thought of becoming a priest had lost its first heavenly enchantment. When we were together—can it be that ten years have passed since those days?—my brother lived, and it was my father's desire that I should enter the Church. But when his eldest son died,—my brother is dead, yes,—there ceased in his mind to be a reason for my forswearing the world. Then he wished me rather to fill my brother's place. I did my best for a time. But when my father, too, had gone,—yes, he too!—came over me the old thirst for quiet, and days sweetly ordered between serene studies and contemplation. I went back to the monastery, to the man who has ever been my best friend,—Father Euphrasius,—decided when the days of my novitiate should be accomplished to transfer all my worldly responsibilities to the Servirol nearest of kin,—that's Didier. Several months went by in preparation. I had hours of feeling myself ripening toward the happy end, becoming sanctified in an absence of all earthly desires. But again came hours when that very complacency in my easy fate filled me with doubt. I feared that I must be a coward to find myself so willingly out of the battle while yet strong and unhurt. And that thought never struck me as having the character of a temptation, because the thought of a world of men and action was hard

to me ; while the thought of monkhood, of renunciation, of dedication, was smooth, gratifying, and in so far partook of the signs of temptation.

“ Then came springtime over the earth ; and I do not know how to describe what came to be all through my being. It was akin, it seems to me, to the spirit in the trees when after the bleak bareness of winter they begin to break into leaves and blossoms. I knew it for a spirit not of evil,— for I felt friends with God, and could not believe that he would mislead me, make traps for me out of the natural outreachings of my heart. Yet I did not clearly perceive what was happening in my soul. I was restless without understanding whither I wished to go, unsatisfied without knowing what I wanted.

“ One night, unable to sleep, I went into the chapel to read by the little lamp that burns incessantly before the image of Mary. I think I was in the mood wherein men see visions ; alive in every fibre, with every sense intensified almost to pain. I unfolded the scroll and tried to gather my broadly flying thoughts and fix them upon the text. Then in the mysterious light became clear to my wonderfully sharpened sight letters that I had never seen before : between the severe black lines flame-tinted shadowy letters, letters that had been blotted out so that the parchment could be used again to a different purpose. How had I never seen them before ? Now, though the light was insufficient almost to distinguish the *ex voti* hanging about the Queen of Heaven, I could read wonderful words,— of love, of love, of happy love, partaking as much of heaven as of earth, yet

sweetly earthly, too, as flowers are earthly and yet must be grateful to a kind God, who hates not the world he made, and are allowed to grow and fulfil themselves. It seemed as if I were reading in my own soul. ‘Oh, not to be shut out from love!’ I cried; and nothing rose to reprove me, my friend made no sign. ‘If I am a tree, not to pluck off every budding leaf and rosy bud, but to be myself and drink in the warm light, and trust to God that the thing he framed be not evil in his sight. If I am a stream, to leap down the hills in search of the deep, and not to stagnate in a dark basin.’ And the next day I bared my heart to Father Euphrasius, who loved me as a son, yet had always vowed mine was no true vocation,—only a vast love of dreaming. And the day after that, when I was almost repenting my decision to resume the unsheltered life in my own hall, I saw her,—she came to the church in accomplishment of a vow made in sickness,—and I thanked God that I was alive.”

“And you still feel the same gratitude?” asked André after a time, willing to break the spell of his friend’s emotion, which indefinably jarred upon him,—“all your gilding is good, all your links hold?”

Servirol opened his lips to reply, then hesitated a second. He could have answered with enthusiasm that his gratitude endured; but at the question had flashed back on him a sense of occasions, just a few, when it had seemed to him in a half-formed way that the best reality fell a little short of the dream. But that only meant that the earth is still the earth, and a little worse than heaven. So he answered

with full conscience of truthfulness : “ I am grateful now as then, André. May God refuse me forgiveness when I cease to be grateful to the loveliest among women for the happiness that has most made me believe in the gentleness of God.”

“ But whence comes that you are at this moment not at the feet of the worshipped beauty, counting off to her these amenities, as I could fancy you once counting off on your rosary prayers to the Maiden Immaculate ? What may so good a husband be doing far from home ? ”

“ Your words seem a just reproach. I have been four days absent. But truly the storm of itself would not have been enough to break my homeward journey. I hoped to find the forester here. I have waited for him. The business I have been about interests him. The account of that, if you are patient, I will keep until we reach home ; for I must tell it to my wife, and it would be tedious for you to hear twice over. Are you inclined to ride ? Or, will it not be better for you to wait until I have reached the hamlet, when I will direct men with a litter — ”

André interrupted him with a sound of scorn, and got to his feet.

Presently the two gentlemen rode slowly side by side, through the gathering shadow, out of the dripping woods, toward the seat of the Servirols.

The hall appeared very plain, very bare ; but the greater part of it was lost to sight, the rays of the iron lamp reaching little beyond the table on which it stood, and the fire which earlier had leaped up

under the ample hood having sunk into a glowering heap.

André sat with his back to that, facing the lady of the house. Such weariness had overtaken him, and temporary abstraction from himself, that he forgot to preserve his affected demeanor of a man in full health and spirits. Now that the meal was done, he sat collapsed in his large chair, with his head sunk between his shoulders, staring quietly at the vacant dark space between Servirol and his wife; so he could see both.

Little was changed in the old house since the day of his brief sojourning there,—a wild lad sent from a home whence the father who could have controlled him was missing. Only, then it had seemed a prison, and he had at the first opportunity run away from it to join the adolescent king whose fame fired his fancy; while now it seemed, if a prison at all, a pleasing one, with a warder such as the eyes could not easily become tired of gazing upon.

The ascete had proved himself no such mean judge of beauty. André felt an impersonal spite against Nature for her wastefulness. The plain creature whom he had pictured as Servirol's wife would have been far more befitting these poor surroundings, this simple man, than the actual woman with her superfluous perfections.

She was a spot of light on the dark room. Her gown was white, so thickly covered with violet silk needlework that it showed like a rich brocade; her coif, that fitted the sides of her head closely, and came well behind the small rosy ears, falling in a

fold down the back of her neck, was violet ; but from under the edge of it, against her hair, came a band of black that helped the hair to its vivid gold, and the skin to its excessive fairness. She wore no jewels save a single little ring.

Her face had in line and hue and texture all the beauty of youth in its bloom. Her features were very delicately and perfectly cut : the nose narrow, the lips thin, the chin round ; her small head turned on a large milk-white throat faintly marked with a Venus-collar. Her body had reached just such harmoniously generous proportions as made seemly in her a certain slowness of movement,— something between majesty and a pretty pensive laziness.

She sat in a high-backed chair ; her face outlined itself delightfully to the two men's eyes against the carved black wood.

She looked at Servirol while he spoke, through the lowered fringe of her lashes ; stone-colored eyes she had, never fully open, nobly overhung by broad, smooth lids : one could not surely say whether she were listening to him or following thoughts of her own.

A maid stood behind her in the shadow, ready to wait on her. The servant's head was just seen above Aurore's chair,— a pale, youthful face under a dark coif that completely covered the hair.

“ I will tell you first,” said Servirol, turning, as he told his story, now to André, now to his wife, helping his speech with abundant gesture of his expressive hands, “ that my errand was entirely successful. I will not keep you in suspense, as a better story-

teller would think himself bound to do. Pierre, my dear Aurore, is forgiven ! Was it not worth the four days' absence, disagreeable as they in themselves were ? This Pierre, you must know, André, is a poor lad on our neighbor De Gueldre's estate,—a young vine-dresser for whose broad brown face one must have a liking. He is a wild, but not a bad fellow. He got himself into trouble: he is always getting himself into trouble; but this time it was much worse than ever before. He was caught deer-stealing in De Mirolune's forest. De Mirolune, you perhaps remember, is rather more distantly our neighbor. Now, your king,—I speak respectfully, he is my king as well, and I am his loyal subject; yet I declare it,—he has made the game laws cruel. Yes, they are cruel. A man, before God ! is worth a little more than a spotted deer; and a man without his right hand is a thing the king should weep over where he is found, and not himself make a common sight. De Mirolune, who does not seem to know very well what he does, taking advantage of the king's law, was for having Pierre's hand off. I heard of it through his sweetheart, who, not knowing where else to turn for help, came in mortal terror to cast herself at my feet, praying that I should interfere. It would have hurt you to see the poor, pretty face, white as linen. I rode immediately to De Mirolune's on a ceremonious visit. He is slightly my wife's cousin. There I found out how matters stood; and (I will spare you a long account of our conversations; some of them animated, I can promise) finally persuaded him to surrender the satisfaction of

seeing how a poacher's hand looks severed, and what face the wretch makes who has to do without it. Praise me a little, Aurore," he said boyishly, bending forward toward her; "I have done nothing good, but through me a bad action has been prevented, and I love your praise —"

"Did you say," asked Aurore,—when she spoke were discovered through her narrow smile rows of beautiful, even pearl,—"did I understand that our cousin the Seigneur de Mirolune gave up the *manant* like that, simply for nothing but your eloquence?"

Servirol for a second looked ever so little embarrassed. "No; I was not eloquent enough for that. I confess he is not easy to argue with. Reasons that to me seem better than good scarcely affect him at all. I tried to make him put himself in the offender's place, and see how the rigidity of the game laws impressed him from that point; but he found it impossible to do. He could be no one, even in thought, but the great De Mirolune, with the right from the king to maim and disfigure; the king having received that same right from God, I must suppose. So, as Pierre's hand had to be saved at any price, and poor Gnon's tears dried, I offered him, if he would oblige me, that bit of vine-land he has so often wished were his, and that I had still not been inclined to gratify him with —"

"Our *manants* in these parts, as you see," said Aurore, turning to André with her fine small smile, "are worth not only a spotted deer; they are worth each beside a yearly dozen casks of fragrant amber

wine. Etienne will tell you how much else. Myself, I do not know."

"Ah, do not jest, dear," cried Servirol. "In your heart you feel the same as I do. We are all poor things," he said rapidly, warmly, "put on this hard earth together, sorely needing one another. God made us all,—all. How can we hurt a brother? Life is too short to accomplish more than a very little good; how shall we waste time doing evil? Myself, I wonder that one can harm any being,—it hurts oneself so much more, one suffers so from pain one inflicts! Ah, you said in jest that you did not know how much more than a deer and various casks of wine a peasant is worth. I do not know how much he may be worth, but he is worth as much as I am. He is framed like me, he too has loves and dreams and powers,—powers, yes, until they take his hand from him. Our souls when we are dead will stand side by side, or his be lifted before mine, as he was the humbler of heart. Oh, that boy! if you had heard his despair when he still thought himself doomed. All his courage had died,—he sobbed. He could not work any more like other men,—he would be an object of pity, if not derision,—everything in the world was become a bitterness to him,—he cursed his Maker! Then, suddenly, the danger had passed like a bad dream. He was to take up life at the point before it had turned horrible. Gnon hung round his neck, laughing and crying and kissing. They will marry and have children,—God bless them!—work and be happy —"

"Oh, my friend, cease!" said Aurore, in a tone that

made contrast with his emotion and checked at once the flow of it. "The Seigneur La Jouvence does not, I suspect, interest himself as you do in these *vileins*. He may in that resemble me," she added lower, yet making every syllable distinct.

"I beg your pardon," said Servirol, with compunction, "Aurore is right. I let myself go. I say it all aloud instead of merely thinking it. I forget that it goes without saying."

There was a short silence. Then André bent forward, leaned his elbow on the table, his chin on his palm, and gazed at Aurore with undisguisedly enlivened interest.

"The features of the noble Dame de Servirol," he said to her presently, with the smile and the tone of old and better days, "if the liberty of speaking of them may be accorded a cousin, bring insistently to the mind those of Diane, Duchesse de Mortclaire, whose presence graced the court on many occasions ever to be remembered."

"The Duchesse Diane ?" asked Aurore. "I know of whom you speak. Echoes of the world reach us even here among the peasants and the wolves, mon Seigneur. And was it not to her that his Majesty himself addressed a madrigal in which she was set above the goddess her namesake ?"

"You have been well informed ; it was to herself."

"Tell me of that great lady and of the king ; describe to us the life among those renowned ones. It is not often we have occasion to speak with one who has in his own person witnessed the battles and the

pageants, the tourneys and parleys and councils that shall live in history."

And *La Jouvence* launched into bright-colored descriptions.

Servirol after his apology had leaned back in his chair, feeling a shade lost, not knowing exactly what had happened. One thing was borne upon him, and it filled him with a vague pain : Aurore felt no sympathy with his joy at Pierre's deliverance. She had been vexed with himself, — but why ? He could not imagine ; only she had been somehow vexed, and that had made her choose not to seem to care about Pierre. He could find no response in her face. For the first time, as his loving, questioning eyes swept it, it made on him the impression of a shut book.

For the first time ? Suddenly, strangely, he felt as if it were not the first time, — there had not been a first time ; and this pain, — it was not the first time either.

Her eyes were dropped on her hands : she was playing with her gold ring while the awkward little silence lasted. She would not look up. With a feeling of dim despair he lifted his eyes from her face, deaf and blind at that moment to a peasant's joys and woes ; they chanced upon the face that rose behind her chair, and rested upon it with growing wonder. The servant, — could it be ? — her eyes seemed to him swimming with tears.

It was Barberine, a poor orphan taken from the convent to be Aurore's handmaid. She moved noiselessly ; she was always silent, always in the shadow, —

one was never aware of her presence except one needed her service. Yet she was young, — he saw it at this moment for the first time ; her face had almost a sort of sweetness in that nun-like coif that came down over the forehead and covered the ears. She might be graceful under the straight dark gown that disguised her form. She was pale and a little thin ; it made her gray eyes with their tears look large.

Her glance met his full of comprehension ; she did not seem aware that she was staring hard at the master. She had heard him tell of the rescued *braceonier* ; it had moved her, and she had forgotten herself, expressing her joy at what he had done with those tears. Suddenly his pain had increased, had become almost keen. He took his eyes from her and listened to André, who even at this moment had bent forward to break the silence by his remark on the resemblance between Aurore and the Duchesse de Mortclaire.

He followed the conversation that ensued with determined attention, occasionally putting in his word. His friend was without doubt delightful ; he was pleased that he could so well entertain Aurore, for whom their quiet life must sometimes be dull. He was also pleased that Aurore could show so much *esprit* ; it was good in her to exert herself to make their poor house pleasant for his unfortunate wounded friend. His pride in her and his gratitude to her crowded into the background those other feelings. He gave himself up to the enjoyment of André's vivid tales.

The sick man with ever increasing feverish excitement was describing to them nothing less than a camp prepared for the meeting of two young kings, the tents being all of golden cloth,—when he broke in the mid of a phrase, his pale head dropped on his breast ; he must be carried to bed and restored.

When Servirol had seen his friend made easy and dosing off under the watch of Modeste, the ancient nurse of the family, he did not at once retire to sleep.

The moon had risen in full splendor, triumphing over the storm clouds. Servirol looked out at it a moment. The night did not give him the usual joy. He turned from it ; but now to his eyes filled with the pure light, his lungs filled with the dewy air, the house seemed dark and close like the tomb, and the sleep that could have made him oblivious was far from his eyes. He went out into the moonlight to walk down his unrest.

Why this misery ? He could not examine into it ; he only wished to turn from it without definition, to make as if it had never been, to be the man he was before. It was only a little thing. It would pass ; pass it must.

And he walked on, farther and farther, attaining as he went a due increase of the desired calm.

He passed the sleeping hamlet that lay below the hall. He was himself again and went composedly, meditating a return on his steps, when at a certain point in the road skirting the hill he came suddenly in sight of the monastery walls,

gleaming high up, far away, white in the moonlight.

He must have known that he should see them, yet the sight gave him a pang. Something within him for the first time since he had left them cried out irrepressibly, "Oh that I were within them again, that I had never left them!"

This homesickness was too strong to be at once overcome. He stood in the road staring at the walls, swept by the tide of his memories back along the old quiet days when Heaven had seemed so near, when at dusk sometimes the picture of Mary he had been praying before till he was faint seemed to become alive: the stars that crowned her darted long rays, and she bent down from the cloudy background and whispered him promises of good to the world. He longed to see the friend of his youth, Father Euphrasius, to confess to him many things, to be helped by him. He could have cast himself face downward in the drenched grass by the roadside, weeping endlessly.

He turned quickly, and ran homeward, with a sense of guiltiness.

The night-air coming swiftly against him did much to dispel the mists in his brain. The glory of the moon had at last wooed him from himself.

He reached his door and there stopped irresolute, still loath to go within. He stood looking upward, taking on his face the benison of moon and stars. Not far from the hall was a little wood divided by a straight grassy road leading to a small open chapel. He would walk just so much farther and pray, then

home again and to sleep. He turned his steps toward the chapel.

The moon fretted the ground with softly swinging spots of light. At the end of the avenue rose the shrine. The high moon whitened its roof and steps; darkness filled the sheltered chamber, at the back of which was painted the image at whose feet the devout placed sheaves of flowers. Servirol was almost at the steps, when he stopped. Some one had come before him. How strange that another than he should have chosen this hour! He could barely distinguish, now that he looked searchingly, a shade within the shade in the interior of the chapel. It was a half-stifled voice that warned him of a human presence. What poor soul came to importune the Queen of Heaven so late, and with what petition? It must be one of the peasants from his hamlet,—a woman, he thought, with some secret sorrow that would not let her sleep, but made her wander forth as he had wandered, seeking healing from the night. The peasants often came there. Even at this moment lay on the steps a limp knot of field-flowers, washed pearly-white with moonshine. Perhaps, if he but knew, he could help this creature that sighed so heavily while praying,—the Virgin might answer her prayer through him. He stood still, scarcely discernible in the shadow under the trees, his black garments and bare black head faintly freckled with the sifted white light.

The voice rose now and then to something more than a murmur, and he caught a phrase meant for Heaven's ear. The one who prayed was not repeat-

ing the ordinary established orisons, but talking to God's mother from the heart,— with entreaties, confessions, self-accusations. He listened with wonder. The words would suddenly come in a passionate flood, to end in unintelligible smothered babblings that brought before the mind a face buried on the arms stretched over the altar.

He understood at last what the poor creature was praying; and then he did not, as he had intended, make known his presence,— speak softly to her and offer aid. He had stumbled upon a heart's secret; it was safe with him, and he was so full of a vast fellow-feeling that it did not occur to him he must flee at once from further hearing, he had no right to be there. His heart itself held him there.

“Mary, Mary, Mary!” went the voice, with interruptions and long pauses, “it is not a sin to so love him. You can look into my heart and assure yourself that I cannot help it! The blind-born could more easily see, than I, having seen, not love him. Have you the heart of a woman? Then grant me somewhat. So little I ask! But something I must have or everlasting despair. It is not that he should love me,— such a thing could never be: the stars are nailed up fast in the skies, I know it; they do not change for any asking of ours. It is not that he should give me pity,— I should not want him to know how fit an object for pity I am. I would only wish that in some strange way — Mary, to whom all things are possible! — I might be near him, that he might even unknowingly softly touch me. I am so lowly that I could be content. The other day, I con-

fess it to you alone, I tangled in the embroidery on his collar one of my long hairs ; and all day I was happy because I saw that it went with him. Can you not make me his hound ? I could stay at his feet, I should be something to him. Or, less than that, any dumb object that he should dignify by using I could content myself to be. Make me but his book of hours, Mary, Mary, that I may feel his eyes !— nothing but his cup, his riding-whip, the brooch in his cap — Ah, Mother of God ! this is madness. Is it wickedness too ? Deal with me, then : I submit. But consider the pain, the heavy punishment already, of feeling that where I would give my life gladly to the last drop, not a little of it is wanted, none needed, none of the smallest use or pleasure. Oh, good mother of the afflicted, make me to suffer less ! I hurt no one, I do what I can to comfort the afflicted, — I too, wherever I find them. Comfort me ! It is not to take this love away, I pray you,— you never could, and I could not bear it to go,— but sanctify it, if so it may be. Make it to lie still in my heart, like an imprisoned dove with wings folded, and be silent always, and ask for nothing. Lift from it, if it displeases God, every earthly yearning. If it be wrong for me to have my wish, make me no more so madly to want it !”

Now, as the prayer continued, it was less frequently interrupted ; the voice was less broken, as if the one who prayed had already gained a little courage. It must be coming to an end, when she would emerge from the shadow, and pass over the brightly illumined steps.

Servirol felt that he must not be seen, but even more strongly that he must not see. Softly he slipped among the trees, and sought home by a way she would be sure not to follow; for it led by a dark tarn, near which had at some time been seen a wandering flame that the peasants invested with a weird quality, and preferred not exposing themselves to meet. He passed the sheet of black, stilly, mantled water, unimpressed, — though he was superstitious too, — so was his mind on this occasion preoccupied with wonder over what he had heard.

That strange love-lament woke a thousand echoes in his breast. He knew all that so well ! Only, he was happy in love, as that poor one was evidently hapless; and he was a full-grown man, while that seemed to him the utterance of some very young thing. But he recognized a sister soul: that was his own way of love, — that unreserved dedication of flesh and spirit. Ah, did not he love his love, then, — all her soul as he divined it through her eyes, — her thoughts, whether she said them or they only passed like reflections of sunshine or shadows of angel-wings across her face ! But not only her immortal part he loved: every perishable golden hair of her was dear to him, every word and smile, — the dimple too that deepened when she laughed, the play of shadow round her mouth when she spoke. He was penetrated through and through with his worship of her; the common touch of her hand could never become an old, stale story. The poor child that prayed, — might God grant her joy, as to him ! He

should remember always to petition for her when thanking God for himself.

He wondered which of the woman-faces he knew could conceal such a heart, and which of the men could have aroused such passion; but there was nothing to assist him in conjecturing.

His own triumphant love, arising to declare itself anew, had drowned all vestige of his earlier uneasy mood. He stopped a moment at Aurore's door before going to rest, and silently conjured the angels to keep her, good dreams to visit her.

Aurore spent most of the day seated before her great embroidery-frame in the deep embrasure of a window, leisurely working flowers on smooth reaches of pale silken stuff,—fantastic flowers, always of such color and design as subsequently used in her attire with masterly aptness set off her beauty. In the window, against the small sun-warm panes, spread themselves green plants, tempering the light, and making the nook pleasantly like a woodland bower.

There, while his sickness lasted, *La Jouvence*, grown chilly, came to sit in the soft warm light, and watch the white hands busy with brilliant silks.

Time was heavy with him. News was rare in that remote spot; and the chance unreliable news one derived from those who had been in the city, at best, disheartening,—long-dragging negotiations for the king's liberty, that ever and ever came to nothing. André would have despaired, had he not been André. He bravely subdued his fretfulness, and did what he

could to lighten his enforced leisure, and make his intrusion light to his hostess.

Servirol was often with them, and listened to André's never exhausted tales, charmed with the sparkling flow of his words. The court, those early brilliant foreign wars, the king's good fortunes and his misfortunes, furnished the ordinary topics of conversation. And André's own adventures,—for he was part of history, one of the blocks that make the pedestal on which stand those whom the rays of glory illumine. He himself had as a stripling been one that helped in the swift erection of the famous bridges over which the guns were dragged; with his own ears he had heard the clear notes of the trumpeter rallying the men all through the night. Ah, that gallant time of the world, when the kings of the earth were young and athirst for fame and pleasure, and all things were done with such careless magnificence! Ah, those days when heroes were the rule; and what heroes,—grand, beautiful, splendid!"

Aurore listened, slowly stitching, never satisfied with hearing. Servirol listened, unfailingly interested too. But he could not remain so long as he would have wished; other things called him. The master has many responsibilities, and he took his peasants greatly to heart in these hard, heavily taxed days. He was glad that in leaving Aurore and André he left each in such good company.

In his rides and walks, whither his various affairs took him, he often found himself puzzling over André and the men André told of. So brave they were, so keen for honor, so unsparing of body and blood, so

true to their word given under certain circumstances ! And then again these same men seemed to him in stories that André told freely, as if they had been to the credit of those concerned, so cruel and so false,— such dishonored gentlemen ! The story of that unfortunate mayor's daughter, who came in procession with her flower-wreathed, white-clad companions to give up the keys of a city, and thought fittest to spoil the beauty of her face because she had seen in the king's eyes that he found it fair, made him sick to the soul. What strange period of its development had the race of men in courts reached, when it could be at once so fine and so fantastically bad ! His heart was often heavy over it. He was glad to think that this removed quiet spot had not been touched yet with a corruption like that, all mantled over with pleasing colors ; that his guest himself had escaped, though he spoke tolerantly of it, exposed it laughingly. Certainly one should not judge harshly ; yet he almost wished that André had shown a more definite sense of it.

André slowly progressed toward health ; the color came back into his pale face ; he was able to join Servirol in his rides,— but not often, as there would long be danger of his hurt opening at any more than ordinary exertion.

From the old portmanteau appeared a wonderful gala-costume to take the place of the faded green and rose,— an azure satin, gold embroidered, and abundantly slashed with white. This intensified the point to many of André's stories ; it seemed to revive about him fugitively the atmosphere of the fes-

tivities at which it had shone. When he leaned far back with crossed legs, touching the lute and singing the *chansons* in vogue in his day at court,—some composed by no less than royalty! — one seemed to have gained a comprehension of what the king himself might be singing and touching the lute, so elegantly was it done, so gallantly were the lines, always on love, delivered.

“ Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol qui s'y fie,”

he sang one evening when asked for a song.

It was a fair evening, a little after sunset at the end of a warm day. They sat at table on a terrace at the head of a broad flight of steps,— they often supped like that in the open air, and lingered long enjoying the serene oncoming of the shadow, the soft, slow budding of the stars.

“ Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol qui s'y fie.”

The words brought back to Servirol the circumstances under which he had first heard them. He could but contrast the André before him with the André of that rainy day in the forester's hut. His heart was gladdened at his friend's improvement. In connection with the remembrance of that afternoon, while the song was developing its melody, came the thought of what had indirectly brought about his meeting with André,— the thought of Pierre; then, by a natural sequence, the thought of the night following his return home, when Aurore had seemed — when he had had strange, unjust

thoughts of Aurore. It made him ashamed to remember them.

He looked over at her, asking in his heart her forgiveness for an old unconfessed offence. She sat with her soft cheek on her soft hand watching André while he sang, with her steady, half-closed eyes, — beautiful, completely beautiful. Behind her, even as on that night, stood the servant in the clumsy gown and the dark coif.

“Behold the audience!” laughed André as he stopped. “I had heard that piping might charm a lizard. *Orpheus charmed tigers; I, vermine!* David charmed a king; *La Jouvence, a pauvresse!*”

Servirol turned to the point André’s eyes referred to. He saw at the foot of the steps an unknown beggar-woman with a baby in her arms. These steps, at the back of the dwelling, led to an unenclosed space, — hillside, with knolls and groups of uncultivated trees; the woman might have strayed there from the road.

Her appearance was most miserable; she was ugly and hollow-cheeked, in rags; her thinness made her eyes look wistfully large. The little baby was thin, too, and his eyes looked wistfully large.

They were, perhaps, listening to La Jouvence’s song, — well worth listening to, it must be said; but they were more certainly looking at the remains of the meal on the table. Their eyes hurt the master. Before moving, in the flash of thought that precedes action, he was gathering up the fragments and taking them to those poor ones, bidding them sit and rest, giving them wine and good words, when Aurore’s

voice fell on his ear: "Drive them away, I pray you. They are too bold, these *crasseux*; they annoy me with their great, hungry eyes."

He looked at her. She had spoken in a sweet voice; she was soft and beautiful, beautiful as before. It seemed like the return of a bad dream. He felt himself standing in the same place as once before, saying to himself, "I have always known it, always suffered from it."

Involuntarily, by an association, his eyes lifted themselves to the face of the pale servant. Her eyes answered his, full of understanding, of sympathy, as before; her whole face breathed pity and goodness. Again a wave of strange intense pain swept through him.

"They shall go farther if the sight of them displeases you," he said gently; "Barberine will help me. Help me, Barberine."

She stepped forward. He placed in her hands one of the old silver cups marked with the ancient crest, and the flagon with what remained in it of wine. He took the loaf of bread and the broken pasty, and master and maid went down the steps. They and the wondering beggar-girl, bidden to follow, then climbed the slope and vanished behind the trees.

Aurore looked at André, and a subtle little smile just narrowed her long eyes.

André looked at her with those shrewd eyes of his, that respected nothing, that unhesitatingly took height and depth and breadth of the person under review. His glance said that he made no mistake

about her; but such as she was, thought her worth a gallant knight's pains in time of peace.

Often after this came back to Servirol that sense of anguish in looking at Aurore's face. He strove with it, disposed of it, quite put it out of sight; then insidiously it was again upon him, insisting upon itself.

And a superfluous bitterness was added to his sorrow when his wife fell below his idolized ideal of her, by the fatality that brought the pale servant always in contrast with her. His eyes, turning from Aurore in those moments when his failure to find in her face what he sought made life like a bad dream to him, were drawn by an inexplicable fascination to fix themselves on Barberine's; and there he found what he had sought before elsewhere.

When an illness declared itself in the hamlet and several died of it, Aurore showed a vast dread of contagion, and fortified herself against it by many precautions,—reasonable and easily forgiven a lovely woman; he thought nothing of it, she did right. But one evening he found Barberine, escaped from her duties a moment, with a dying child in her arms. It was Barberine seen in the distance crumbling bread to the birds,—such a small, merciful thing to do!—Barberine casually discovered tending a lame cur: things not expected of a *châtelaine*; it is more befitting, perhaps, if her husband be poor, that she be embroidering wherewith to fitly adorn her lovely body and do his house honor. But yet, but yet—He began to wish uneasily that Barberine were gone;

that she were not standing always silent, pale, simple, behind Aurore's chair at meals. It was selfish, unjust,—he could not help it: he wished not to see her any more with her good face that answered him too readily, that seemed to make itself the accomplice of those unnatural thoughts of his,—thoughts, was it possible? that arraigned the soul's queen, Aurore!

These thoughts, this pain, were not uninterrupted. The magician had it in her power when she chose to efface all feeling in him but one of gratitude to her, unreserved love; to lull to rest for a time the bitter, ruffled waters in his heart.

He rode from her quite happy one morning, bent on a journey to the city, where he had business to keep him a day or two. Her words on parting had been more than her wont tender. She had so softly said that though she should miss him, yet he must take his time and his pleasure, and give no thought to her; she should be vexed if she must think he came home the sooner for her.

He regretted nothing in his life. A melody fitted itself to his light heart-beats as he rode, turning now and then in the saddle while his house was in sight. He saw on his cuff the gleam of a gold hair caught in the embroidery. The accident touched and pleased him. He remembered the prayer of the unknown that moonlit night; he discerned great good-sense in the poor child's bit of folly shamefacedly whispered to the good Mother. He was glad to have this gold hair of Aurore's for company.

In the city he heard a report at which his heart

leaped within him. It caused him to abridge his affairs, and ride home with all speed.

He found Aurore and André at table; they had not expected him so soon. They wondered at his flushed cheek, his lighted eye, as he took his seat with them.

“André!” he said, with ringing voice, “in the city it is rumored that the king is free!”

André sprang to his feet, the stirred blood flying to his face, and shouted: “If it be true, if he have set foot on his own land, then the Lord of Armies be praised! André la Jouvence is himself again!”

He could not contain his excitement: he questioned, and could scarcely listen to answers; he could think of nothing but his king’s home-coming. He must ride to the city, he declared, next day at the latest, to ascertain what was really known. Servirol might have taken his information carelessly.

“See our friend!” spoke Servirol, playfully, to Aurore. “These demonstrations of unbounded joy are at the thought of leaving his musty friends of the province, and their great empty barn of a place. Ah, *ma belle!* I must think you have badly employed your time, when I was relying on you to keep him at our side by inspiring him with a taste amounting to passion — for embroidering flowers on silk!”

Aurore did not look at him, but kept her eyes on the table, following a little lady-bird that had crept from a rose lying near her plate. It struck him that she might not be feeling well. The muscles of her cheek suddenly rippled under the smooth skin, twitched as if she had clinched her teeth; and with

a quick gesture and more force than was necessary for the easy act, she crushed the scarlet insect.

“Poor little *bête à Bon Dieu!*” involuntarily exclaimed Servirol.

Aurore then looked at him straight, with eyes even less wide open than usual,—eyes that scarcely seemed to him her own. He felt for a second, strangely, as if the *coup de grâce* to the lady-bird in some vague way had relation to himself. His heart slackened.

But no: why think Aurore ill or angry? Some women dislike insects. The blood showed itself rosily in her cheek again; and she took up his own light tone to tease André about his prompt projected desertion of themselves. He was almost afraid lest she might wound him, so sharp seemed to him her playful assumption of bitterness.

His eyes at this point sought the face of Barberine. She stood behind the chair as usual. He knew what he should see, and that it would hurt; but always he must look and be hurt. His eyes opened large. It was Barberine’s gown, her coif, but not her face. This girl had small, quick black eyes under jetty brows.

“Barberine!” faltered Servirol,—“what has become of Barberine?”

“I put her to the door,” replied Aurore, with profound calm.

“Barberine—put to the door!” stammered Servirol. “For what reason, *chère?*”

“She displeased me; that is also a reason.”

“But—where will she go? She has no home,—

she is an orphan ! Oh, my dear, did she displease you so heavily ? What was it she had done ? ”

“ I could not suffer the sight of her. Furthermore, she was a thief ! ”

“ Barberine — thief ? Oh, oh ! are you convinced of what you say ? ”

“ I pray you, my friend,” said Aurore, with a touch of sharpness, “ say no more ! I did as seemed to me best. One would think that wenches are rare in these parts. I have already, as you see, more than adequately replaced her.”

Servirol spoke no word further. He felt his heart fail. He did not listen any more to what was said, though mechanically trying to preserve a look of courteous attention. Many thoughts swarmed through his brain, confused ; gradually one became very clear, and resolved itself into a definite intention ; and the excitement that filled him calmed itself.

“ Aurore,” he said, breaking into her conversation without apology, “ I saw to-day, in riding home, a solitary yellow lily by the roadside ; and it brought back to my mind that open glade, up behind the hill, whither we rode together one day soon after our marriage. Have you the place in mind ? It was paved with those little lilies. I thought how it must at this very time be as it was that day, all lilies, and had a longing to revisit it. As André tomorrow leaves us to go to the city, will you accompany me there ? — I thank you. And now, if you permit it, I leave you. A *malaise* has come over me that makes me wish for the air.”

He went out into the twilight, and wandered aimlessly, not as sometimes before trying to get away from himself. A definite, settled pain now possessed his heart ; he recognized that it would not be trodden down, escaped from, and put out of sight again. He mused on the morrow, and tried to shape its features. When great glows of heat would invade his heart and make it ache, stirred with passionate love and grief till he was filled with a longing to weep aloud, he would crush down the rising storm, determined to think temperately and resolve wisely. So he walked slowly, with head bent, hands clasped behind him.

He happened upon the avenue that led to the chapel ; there was a good clear path to walk, where he would not be distracted from his thoughts by the necessity of looking where he put his feet.

He paced up and down, up and down, in the gloom under the trees.

It was a sad evening, gray and damp. A mournful, monotonous noise came through the air from a swamp somewhere, like painful labored breathing. The leaves hung lifelessly. Now and then a faint light leaped with a shudder from the horizon, and immediately was gone,—as if a great lurid eye had opened, glared a second, then shut.

Servirol suddenly stopped in his pacing. He had become aware of a figure slipping among the trees. It seemed to him trying to avoid attention. He called to it. It did not answer, but stopped at once, and stood still while he approached. He could hear its sharp, uneven breathing.

“Who is it ?” he asked.

“It is I, Seigneur,” said a voice scarcely above breath.
“Barberine !”

“Yes, Seigneur. I am going. I implore your pardon for being still found here. I did not go into the house after I was commanded to leave it. I have been among the trees. I had a fancy for waiting till I had seen the Seigneur ride home from the city.”

“Ah, my poor child ! you thought I should intercede for you.”

“No, no, — I had no hope.”

“But it would only be right that I should intercede for you ! It is my duty not to allow that you be falsely accused and unjustly punished, — I see that so plainly ! But oh, my poor child, it is better that you go ! My conscience rises against me at this moment, and calls me coward and base. But yet I feel — I feel that I must say it is better that you go ! Barberine, forgive me !”

“Oh, my master, let your soul rest. I accuse myself, — I am much to blame, — you do not know. But I will atone, — atone ; all my guilt shall be washed out !” she added in a stifled voice.

They were speaking in whispers. Her accent was unsteady, as if she had been in prey to some violent excitement and scarcely knew what she said.

“Guilt ? My sister, do not exaggerate. Be just to yourself ; to others I have ever seen you merciful. I know you are good, good, good. Where shall you go ?”

“I know not. But yes, — home.”

“To the convent, Barberine ?”

“No, no, — to my mother.”

“Your mother? But are you not an orphan, Barberine, left on the convent steps and brought up among the good sisters with the orphans?”

“That is true. I said mother!” replied Barberine, with a jerky, suffocated laugh. He had never heard her laugh before. “I never knew my mother; yet I find natural to call mother that which will be good to us, more good than anything has ever been.”

“You have friends, then?”

“Yes, friends, who will receive me with open arms.”

“You are going to your friends? Where?”

“Oh, not far.”

“Wait for me but a moment, Barberine, and I will return with money for your voyage and your needs. And old Juste shall see you on your way.”

She caught at his cloak to stop him. “Oh, no!” she murmured anxiously, “I could not take — I want nothing — I shall not need! The journey is short.”

“But will you let me know that you have arrived safely, — that you do well?”

She hesitated, then laughed again, a little wildly: “Ah, if I could send a message back! I shall soon know if it be possible. I promise that I will try. But it may not be what you think. You may see a shut rose open at you suddenly like a red human mouth, and speak. You may look at your hound, and find yourself thinking, ‘Truly, it has a woman’s eyes.’ God! what am I saying? I do not know, myself. I have cried so much since yesterday that my head is light.”

"My poor girl, you are overwrought. Take patience, my poor girl. All will be well with you. Night and morning I will think of you earnestly when I pray, and implore angels to guard you."

"You will pray for me,—you! I bless you, and conjure you, master, not to forget. Pray that my sins be forgiven."

"And you, my sister," said Servirol, eagerly, "pray the same for me. I feel sinful enough,—weak; yet I cannot, cannot but repeat, 'It is better that you go!'"

There was a silence. They stood in the almost darkness. He thought that she was going. Suddenly she said pointlessly, in a colorless tone, as one who speaks in sleep: "The day of your marriage,—you remember?"

"Yes!"

"It was in the little church. The orphans in white frocks and veils scattered flowers before the bridal couple as they came to the altar. One girl dropped a little rose. The bridegroom was taking no heed; he set his foot on it."

"What is this?"

"What was I saying? Ah, something that came back to my mind. You crushed it underfoot without knowing. I remember well. It was my first glimpse of the world, and every little feature of it is painted fiery bright on my brain."

"I am sorry," said Servirol, wonderingly, "that I trod on a rose."

"What does it matter? I do not know what I

have been saying. Let me go before uttering folly. Adieu, mon Seigneur—”

“ Adieu, Barberine. God go with you, give you peace !”

“ God !—God !” She repeated the name softly, like a syllable without meaning. “ Ah, well, my head is too hot now — but it will cool. Adieu, mon Seigneur !”

“ Adieu, my sister ! God go with you !” he said again. He impulsively took her head in his hands, kissed her forehead, and let her go.

She took a step or two uncertainly. He heard her gather breath in a convulsive sob, and she had fled among the trees.

Early, in the coolness of the day, set forth Servirol and Aurore. She was mounted on a palfrey whose swinging trappings brushed the tops of the wild grasses along the climbing road. He walked beside her, sometimes supporting her in the saddle with his encircling arm, sometimes leading the beast, for the path was at best rough and undefined. Often there was no path ; then Servirol could only find the way by stopping and taking account of the landscape.

The man and his wife did not speak much ; the exertion of climbing excused him from making more than occasional efforts at an exchange of thoughts ; and she, sitting easily in her saddle, with her hand that held the reins resting idly on her knee, began singing softly an interminable ditty,—a legend with verse after verse on the adventures of a noble dragon-slayer.

His heart was very still ; it was strange to himself that it should be so very still.

It was a fair day, not cloudless ; but the drifting clouds, like thin floating veils over the faces of ladies, did not deter from the sky's beauty. The sun was not importunately hot,—just so hot as to draw sweet smells from the mountain herbs crushed by the small hoofs of the palfrey, and the drops of resin on the pines they passed among. There was in the air a long acute tremor of insect voices.

While she sang, he turned back now and then and looked at her.

Her face was like a delicate rose in shadow ; the upcast reflection of the sun under the brim of her hat sweetly lighted it, and warmed to a deeper red her mouth listlessly uttering the foolish old words. She looked the same as on that day—it seemed a long time ago—when they had come over this road together before, just the same.

His heart lost something of its torpor every time he turned back and watched her, listening to her singing. She looked just the same,—nay, she was the same ! He declared to himself that she was the same, and his faith rose phoenix-like again over its own wreck.

Then he began to talk to her in his old vein, abundantly, excitedly, of many things,—commenting on all they passed, speaking from a deep love of nature, at once spiritual and sensuous, and a light happy fancy.

She replied readily ; but presently started another ditty, longer than the one before, on the miracles of the six days,—rude lines, fit to impress themselves

easily on the memories of children, describing the making of light, of plants and beasts, of man and woman; verse evenly divided from verse by a quaint, elaborate, senseless refrain. It sounded to him pretty from her mouth, tender, womanly. He could think of her humming it so, rocking a cradle. There was such patience, it seemed to him, in that song,—the story with its vivid, diverting representation of the *bon Dieu* making ruby-edged frills for the daisies and rainbow necklets for the turtle-doves and silver armor for the fishes, to please the little one if he would not sleep; then the cooed empty refrain to lull the wakeful little brain, and make the eyes shut; but if it failed, then another picture to charm the child's vigil, then another weary little attempt to impose on him sleep. He was touched to hear her sing it, and listened to every word, caressing the picture it built up before him.

At last they had reached the spot he sought. It was a sheltered fold in the hills, a small cup-like hollow. The wind brushed around it, and discouraged the grass above its rim; but its breath was spent before it could sweep down into it. There the grass was thick and soft, and at this season made beautiful by myriad tiptoeing lilies. One part of it was already in shadow. Servirol helped the lady to dismount, found her the pleasantest spot to rest, then eased the palfrey, and let it loose to feed. He spread on the grass by his lady food and wine that he had taken from the saddle-bag, and sat beside her,—glad of the coolness, the repose, the beauty around them with its tender association.

While they ate he spoke with a gentle emotion of that last time ; he rehearsed many things that had happened to them since their marriage,—common they might have seemed to others, but to him each had its significance, its price.

They spent what was to him a sweet hour.

Then, as Aurore expressed a desire to sleep, he spread his mantle for her where the grass was softest, and saw her lain down in slumber, the bright braids of her hair uncovered and let fall, her gown opened at the throat.

Himself he did not sleep, but lay not far with his head on his bended arm, his face turned toward her, a long light branch in his hand to wave over her at need, waiting till she should wake to speak at last of what had been weighing on his heart.

He lost himself in vague dreaming.

But how long she slept ! It seemed to him hours since she had closed her eyes. He could not calculate time by his reverie ; but the appearance of the sky spoke of a day already on the decline. They must descend the hill while the light was sufficient, the more that a sadness was invading the sky, clouds seemed gathering for storm.

He must speak now. The thought made his heart beat harder. He looked at her still a little while in her sleep. One of her hands was stretched out through the grass, with the sea-shell palm upward,—such a womanish, small hand ! And it belonged to him ; it wore the ring with the words engraved inside that made her his. He looked for the gleam of the gold, and was a little hurt at not seeing it ; a

wife should not put off such a ring. But she would have no doubt a trifling reason to give. He approached her noiselessly over the grass without rising, took her hand between his, and softly, repeatedly kissed it.

She half opened her eyes. He had meant to speak at once; but now he did not know how to do it. He felt clumsy and foolish; he sought time, and took refuge in a commonplace.

“Where is the little ring I gave you, Aurore?”

She made the pouting face that meant she did not know.

“I took it off because it had grown small, and fretted me. Now I cannot find it again. I assure you I did not lose it. But you will understand, when one has always a thief beside one — ”

He dropped her hand then, and looked at her with a troubled, sorrowful face. He could speak now.

“Barberine was not a thief,” he said; “you cannot think it. O Aurore, O my dear soul!” he cried, stretching as he knelt his hands toward her with a gesture of yearning deprecation, his face full of the utmost tenderness for her, a desire while hurting not to hurt, “I do not wish to grieve you. But, O Aurore, O my dear soul, are you not afraid that you sometimes think too little? I know how deeply sweet you are. I feel assured that you would always wish to be kind. Yet sometimes I think without knowing it you give pain. Sometimes you make suffer where you need not, and sometimes where you might give comfort, you forget, dear, — you forget. You are young, and so beautiful, and so

blessed with every charming gift,—there were a peculiar grace, a more than common praise attached to your being generous to those whom Heaven one knows not wherefore has made miserable. You are so lovely that if you would stop to say a good word to the cripple at the church-door he must form a conception of what angels in Paradise are, and it would give him courage to hobble on a little farther in life. Ah, my dear soul," he poured forth from his full heart, "we are God's children all, and there is not great and small with him; and I know he is grieved when a little, harmless, happy life is put out wantonly,—yes, dear, even a *bête à bon Dieu's*. You cannot think how it hurt me to see you kill that pretty thing!"

He stopped a moment. Aurore lay with her face away from him, turned straight to the skies, perfectly composed, as if she neither saw nor heard.

"You are young now," Servirol pursued fervently, "and so lovely! And I so love you,—so love you, that I tremble if your hand but brushes me, that I would suffer anything to save you a little, little suffering. You have a face like a flower, and hair like gold; but your face will fade, dearest one, your hair will be gray. I will love you then as now. But if you have not done good,—if there is no memory of merciful actions to make a lasting springtime in your heart, if you cannot hope that the poor world is ever so little less to be pitied for your passing through it,—in those wintry days when you will have long leisure to think (for the time of pleasures and works will be past) it will

surely come to you to understand a little the meaning of life: angels have large opportunity of whispering to those near to die! It will come to you to think, ' If only I could have it over again,— have a little time and strength to do the things I see now we were meant to do; to succor, to console, to teach, to be good, in fine! ' Oh, save yourself that bitter moment, my Aurore! My heart breaks for you. Oh, my beloved one, be good now, be good, be good! "

She lay still as before, with a face empty of all expression, turned up to the sky, unseeing, unhearing.

In the earnestness of his last words he had suddenly laid hold of her arm and shaken it to make her respond. She started at his touch as if a serpent had stung her. She writhed to a sitting posture, and thrust toward him suddenly her set face,— all the dregs of her soul risen to her eyes. She stared at him fixedly a second; then, unable further to repress herself, through her shut teeth spat at him the word, "Monk!"

Servirol had let go her arm and drawn back as if struck, turning mortally pale. He could not take his eyes from hers; he regarded her breathlessly, and a dark fire dried the moisture that had come into his eyes as he conjured her to be good, to be good! Then he heard a strange, hard, intense voice say,— it did not seem to him as if he himself were speaking, but something within him that he could not prevent or control: "I know you well enough, Aurore; I only pretend to myself and to others. You have a

heart of stone, — nothing can touch it ; and I have long known it, almost from the first. You are bad. You never loved me. You married me I know not why, — but yes, I do. For a number of reasons, not over-noble. I built up my happiness out of my own fancy, — I have an accursed powerful fancy. Woman, don't move ! ” he heard the voice rave with an increase of fierceness. “ Never have I seen you do one little thing that denoted a heart. I have only seen you in various ways embroider flowers for the adornment of your beautiful person. Beautiful, — be satisfied, it is beautiful, and its beauty has enslaved me. It deserves that with these two hands I should forever spoil it ! ”

He could not but groan aloud at the show of unfeigned terror with which she hurried to her feet. He covered his face with trembling hands. “ For God's sake,” he gasped, “ don't be afraid of me. You know that I could never hurt a hair of your head. Only, I have long been going mad, and now it has come completely upon me. Aurore, Aurore, my poor girl, you need not be afraid of me. Come, we will go home.”

He climbed to the top of the hollow, and whistled for the palfrey. It came at his call. In silence and with strange composure he put on its trappings, and helped the lady on to its back ; then seized it by the bridle and led it down the homeward way.

The sky had become overcast ; a rising storm-wind bent the grasses all one way. They said not one word in all the journey. He never looked back. Three or four times he, the steady-footed, stumbled

and fell. He got to his feet again promptly, rubbing his forehead, as if the cause of his fall had been there. The darkness had almost closed in when they reached home.

André met them with joyful words.

“It is true ! He is in his own land again. When he had come to the frontier where the exchange was made, he leaped upon an arabian and galloped break-neck, — the gallant king ! — till he reached the city where his noble mother awaited him. Ah, my good Etienne, I cannot wait. You will understand. I must go at once. I must go to-night, and gallop break-neck as he did until I have reached him. What will you have, my good Etienne, for the kindly hospitality you have afforded me ? Is it gold, honors, a place at court ? Speak now, friend, for you are like to get what you ask for.”

“Nay,” said Servirol, with a pale simulation of a smile, “I am repaid already by your trusty friendship. Farewell, André. God accompany you ! I do not urge your staying further, for I appreciate the strength of your desire to go. Again, God be with you ! I beg you will ever call our house your own, and I salute you now. Forgive a sudden distemper that makes me unfit for anything but solitude and silence.”

His farewell greetings to André over, he got to his chamber, small and simple as a cell. He bolted the door ; he dropped into his chair, and with his elbows on the table and his temples between his fists, sat staring at the little flame of the lamp.

He did not reflect ; he felt thoughts seething

through his brain, with no power to control and order them, and no definite attempt at such a thing.

The night wore on, as he sat with this burning, confused head.

The house was very still; but, outside, the wind now and then came like a giant night-bird beating its wings against the windows, and hustling off lamely with a hoarse complaint that it had hurt itself.

And the silent house presently seemed to its master to have become alive with whispers,—fine hissing sounds, stifled confessions of secrets, insults unspeakable just suggested in a soft, unseizable sibilance. And when he lent ear with a sick, hammering heart, the dusk beyond the little circle of light from his lamp seemed to him full of fugitive shapes that crumbled, slunk away when he looked fixedly, and let the familiar walls be seen through them,—round eyes, not human, but wheel within wheel of glow-worm fire, darting tongues and whisking draperies of a sombre red. Ah, it was only the spangled blood in his eyes! He pressed his hands over them; but at once the air seemed so thick with these presences that it could not be breathed. He staggered to his feet, suffocated. To Aurore! He must get to Aurore,—forgive, and implore forgiveness. It was impossible to live if they were not friends.

He reached her door. From the shadow of the curtain, as he was pushing it aside, stepped Durande, the new maid, with the eyes like beads glittering through their inky loop-holes. She stood in his way.

He motioned her aside; but she remained in her place and said, "My mistress has begged that for an hour she be not disturbed."

He looked at her; in that moment he hated her face,—it seemed to him evil, one with the voices and shadows of this God-forgotten night. Without speaking he withdrew, and tried to arm himself with patience till the hour should have passed.

Now he paced his room unceasingly, only stopping to see how far the sands had run. He felt desperately ill and shaken,—not from the effect of that day alone; long a sorrow had been gnawing at his heart, and he had striven to deal with it by secret vigil and fast, and his body was worn and unfitted for strain.

He was forced at last to sit; he listened intently then for the sounds of the storm, to keep himself from becoming a prey to the delusions of before. The wind was now like an enemy charging the house. It gathered itself together in the distance, and came on, gaining in speed and violence till it battered the walls, made them groan, shake,—rock, it almost seemed,—then it dropped, baffled, and drew itself off to repeat the assault. At one moment its approach sounded so like a cavalry charge that Servirol involuntarily started to his feet. Sounds of hoofs? Folly! But, no,—through the wind as he listened came certainly the sound of galloping. Ah, yes,—*La Jouvence* starting on his way to the king. A good journey to him!

When the hour had nearly passed, Servirol went again to his wife's door. Durande stood there still.

“Let me pass !” he ordered.

“If the Seigneur please,” she said with a shrug of her shoulders ; she looked pale in the draught-tormented light. “But my mistress is not within ; she went forth to take a little air near an hour ago.”

“Out of doors — in this weather !” faltered Servirol, staring stupidly at the maid’s face, the expression of which now started him on a strange track of thinking.

Then he remembered the sound of galloping horses, and suddenly, as by a great flash of hell-light, came back to his mind a thousand things, — things seen only with the superficial eye and never before this instant questioned, interpreted.

He choked, ineffectually struggling for the words of a curse, his uplifted arm convulsively laboring the air in the direction they must have taken. Durande saw his terrible face turn black ; then something strange seemed to have happened in his head. He dropped heavily on to the ground, and lay like dead.

The little flame of the lamp sputtered a moment in the spilt oil, and showed the servant fleeing down the corridor. It went out, and an irrepressible shriek for help tore the darkness.

Another season possessed the earth, — the sad, dead season : no flowers, no birds, little of beauty save in the sallow sunset lingering behind the dark network of the trees.

In the quiet monastery, whither Servirol had been

taken for skilful nursing, Father Euphrasius in these days studying the face of his patient felt assured that he saw intelligence returning to the great hollow eyes continually fixed upon the ceiling.

One day, himself unseen, he saw tears overclouding them. Then he spoke softly as he bent over Servirol's bed and took his hand,—

“How is it with thee, my son ?”

“Well, — well, father !” replied Servirol, in the echo of his old voice, and with the shadow of his old courteous manner and smile. “Your affectionate care has prevailed. It were ungracious to wish that you had been less successful.”

He lay still awhile, with his upturned face like a worn white wedge between the scattered inky strands of his hair ; then in his faint, gentle voice he said : “I can think now, I can think clearly ; but it is strange to myself how little I suffer. Perhaps it was coming back to myself in my old cell, and seeing about me the dear well-known faces that have no association with pain ; but the strange year that I spent away from these walls seems almost as if it had not been, — as if it were a dream, and the impression of it on the way to fading. No, I do not suffer, I cannot suffer,— I think I shall never feel again. I—I only wish that the world were green !” he added with a touch of a sick man's querulousness. “I want the trees to have leaves !”

And Father Euphrasius was prompted not to tell him yet, since he was not suffering.

But as his strength came back to him, Servirol's heart was evidently less at rest. He said no more

than before; but his face, still staring up at the ceiling, reflected the workings of a tormented mind. Then one day again Father Euphrasius touched his hand and said to him, "My son, how is it with thee? Unburden thy heart to me!"

"My father," broke forth Servirol, shaken with a cruel emotion, "what canst thou of the quiet, holy experiences have to say to a man who has found friendship past conception hollow, love past believing false? What consolation is there to offer such a man? Oh, spend not reasonable, well-calculated, soothing words on me, my good, good father,—the occasion for thy holy office is not now. For the hatred, the thirst for blood that made me mad are past. Yes, I could hear myself raving out aloud in the frenzied period of my illness. Then my soul was torn with all sinful passions; but now I swear I feel sorrow only,—oh, sorrow, sorrow, never-ending sorrow! And while my heart breaks," he added bitterly, humanly, "she is smiling perhaps at the court of the king!"

"At the court of the King!" repeated Father Euphrasius, solemnly.

Servirol turned on him his great dull eyes. The old man's voice shook.

"My son, my son, thrust not back on me my tenders of comfort, for I have a helpful message indeed. Thy wife, I tell thee truly, did not forsake thee. When thou thoughtst her flying in guilt, disaster had overtaken her."

And while Servirol listened with breathless open lips, he pursued: "Take courage to hear, and God

inspire me ! Thy wife is dead,— has been numbered with the dead these long, long weeks. One will never know how it happened. Old Modeste, the crone, seeking herbs that grow by water, discovered in the dark tarn that lies behind the chapel not far from thy house — We knew her by these tokens,— the little gold ring with the words inside, and the great gold hair."

And he drew from his bosom and laid softly on the coverlet beside the widower a little shining hoop, and a handful of shining hair.

"Dead! — only dead!" thought Servirol, finding in that thought after the first horror of it the courage to live.

Dead loving him, too ; for she had placed on her hand again the ring carelessly put off, and had put off the flowered gown he in his anger cast reproach upon, to don a plain dark garb, they told him,— the garb it must be he had first seen and loved her in when she came to the church in fulfilment of her vow. He had spoken to her rash, hard words, and to her in her suffering, as to him, the house that night had seemed oppressive. She had but gone forth for a little air, as Durande had said, and had met death. Had she sought it, in her despair at his understanding her so ill, or in a moment of rashly morbid penitence ? All his life then given to atonement, spent good-doing in her name, would be too little. He prostrated himself to her memory, he made her his saint ; and gradually peace crept back into his heart, and the little year of his

double life found again its soft, shining, perfect colors.

And Barberine taken from the black water rested in the tomb of the Servirols. At her side one day he should be laid for his long sleep, with the lock of her hair on his heart.

SHEPHERDS.



SHEPHERDS.

THERE was once a king's son, but at his father's death he did not himself become a king. The land was filled with commotion ; and one black night he was urged by friends who had remained faithful to him in a time of discord and rebellion, to mount horse and fly for his life.

He spent long years in exile ; there he grew to be a man.

From time to time came to him in the solitary place among the hills where he lived in retirement given up to quiet studies, a messenger bringing news of his kingdom, and keeping him informed of the movements of his adherents, who had never abandoned the hope of setting him on the throne.

The messenger returning from the young prince was always narrowly questioned by those who sent him concerning every particular relating to the noble exile. What the grave intriguers gathered from his answers was sufficiently depressing to their hopes. The prince appeared contented with his obscure condition. He was found ever with a book in his hand, or known to be rambling over the hills without so much as the excuse of sport. He was dreamy and sweet-tempered ; not apparently

in any degree adventurous, ambitious, or even definitely resentful of the fact that another held sway in his place.

Therefore it seemed advisable to those wise politicians that something should be done to rouse this unpromising nursling of royalty before he became fixed in his lamentable indifference to greatness.

So, before the good moment had really arrived he was sent for and brought back into his own country to head the war against the usurping powers.

He proved himself able and brave beyond all expectation. But the good moment, as I said, had not arrived ; every scheme was immature ; defeat followed upon defeat to the arms of the loyal ; to fly and wait still longer seemed the only thing left their leader to do. But flight delayed until the last necessity had become more than difficult.

The prince, with a price on his head, and in a region continually scoured by the enemy in search of him, remained safe within easy reach of those who required his blood, almost at the door of his great foe. For months he lived as a shepherd among shepherds, who never suspected that they were harboring a king.

Now and then came to him at fall of day a shepherd friend, ostensibly bringing him news of his home over the hills ; and one day hinting homesickness, he took his leave and returned with his old companion to their former haunts, and that was the end of his relations with the shepherds.

Then again blazed civil war. But the days now were ripe ; the good moment had come. Soon, though

after much desperate warfare, the country was reduced to order, the rightful heir was placed on the throne; it was the turn of the traitor to hide his endangered head.

Peace smiled. The blackened battle-fields were filled with corn. Upon the ruins of burned villages rose other villages; and as soon as the grass was thick on the green there was dancing to the music of pipes. Great swords hung idle in the armories; young knights bethought themselves of forgotten roundelayes.

But the climax to the public joy was reached when the young king took a bride from over the sea. Then truly there were festivities worth writing about, were it not that one feast is so like another, and easily imagined.

Indeed, one might well be tired before the end of all the gayeties pertaining to a king's nuptials; but it were improper in the king himself to show signs of weariness. However, if at the end of a feast unduly prolonged, all the guests were genuinely enjoying themselves,—if the new queen and the ladies who had accompanied her from over the water were so remarkable for beauty and sprightliness that they could enthrall the attention of all within eye or ear shot,—it would not be a subject of great wonder that the king—a silent, morose person at best—could grow pale with tedium unnoticed, even that he could slip away and for a moment be unmissed.

He passed quickly from room to room of the palace, seeking quiet; but all the chambers were lighted, all were bedecked in honor of this great occasion. The garden,—even that was lit with lamps suspended

among the trees ; he could see holiday figures moving among them. And to leave the palace, the seat of joy, he must pass the sentinels, who would naturally wonder. The poor great king, sickened by a sense of his captivity, stepped into the deep recess of a window ; there at least the heavy hangings could be so drawn as to shut from his eyes the lights of the interior. He leaned against the side of the casement, and cast back his head so that he could forget the idle, colored lights swinging below, see only through the tops of the trees the severe stars, the tranquil clouds.

And this it was to be a king ! God knew he had not wished for greatness. He had undertaken to uphold the right, which had happened in his case to mean reconquering a throne for himself ; now that the struggle was over, that he had played his part of a man, disappointing no one who relied on him, and there was time to think, to be a very person, God might know that power was not what he wanted, — power over people who were nothing to him, to whom he was nothing.

With yearning fondness his thought reverted to the days of his exiled youth.

Good days ! but there had been even better ; and his thought brooded on the days when he had tended sheep.

As an exile, those who surrounded him — he felt now with a sense become morbid since he had lived among these flatterers — had not seen in him only a man ; he had still been to them a king's son, a possible sovereign. And as such, when fortune favored

him, he had remembered them with gifts and honors. It had become a title of distinction to have sheltered him ; they had their reward.

But the shepherds had not known. He had been only a shepherd among them, — just himself, unadorned man. And he had never given them anything ; they were not aware to this day that he was other than a poor lad. And they had been kind to him in their rude way ; they had seemed to like him, — not surpassingly well, but he found value in that moderation ; they had expressed no more, no less, than they felt. And one among them —

This bride of his, now, — this political exigency, of another race, from a foreign place, — beautiful she should be called ; but what was beauty to him ? Her shallow light-brown eyes, full of the restless sparkling of wit, had no language to his eyes ; her graceful, mannered mouth, that he was assured would at some time think itself obliged to utter various lies such as he could with ease imagine, repelled him before it had spoken them. He looked her over in his mind with a cold dislike for her, with her civil grace, her fastuous habiliments, and the nerve-vexing perfume that escaped from their every shining fold. He repeated to himself that she had taken him, as he her, — a necessary evil. She had gained already what she wanted, — power, position. The gift of his heart, had he been moved to spend it on her, was among her least requirements. She had nothing to do with his real life ; to her, too, he was only the king. His wife made one of the crowd who by their exaggerated, never-neglected deference to something that was not

he — not the love-hungry, human thing keenly conscious of his little worth, his little importance — would contribute to give him this unutterably forsaken feeling of being nothing at all, no one, a simulacrum, a hollow mask, a ghost, — having himself, the part of him that was not king, no place in the world, no home whatever, no state, prospect, hope.

To the shepherds alone he was a man ; therefore he loved them. And it seemed to him that in all the world none but they had ever loved him. And one among them —

How refreshing to think of those days at the end of a day such as this had been, — full of noise and empty display, and the pretence of joy ! He thought himself back on the hill-side in the spring of the year. The sheep grazed in little groups among the blooming gorse. Scattered through the patches of new grass were violets ; primroses too in little clumps. And under the thin-clad trees, among last year's leaves, the hosts of the blue-bells. The wavy plain below was pearly green, faintly spotted and striped here and there with the darker trees, — firs and pines. The little hills at the horizon were opal-colored with mist, — each successive line milkier as it was farther, till they blended with the sky. The shadows of the clouds sailed slowly across the valley, sweet to watch through half-closed eyes. The air quivered and shimmered up from the ground. He lay on his back with the welcome sun in his face. In those perfect morning hours the struggle seemed so far away. He could almost dream that it was the youth of the world, and he the first man, not lonesome yet.

Sometimes after lying long, aimlessly thinking,—for he found it possible under the influence of sun-warmth and sounds of bees in the broom to cut himself off from all unprofitable thinking over of difficulties past and to come,—he would wish for a book, one of the many that had kept him company in former hours of idleness. There were passages in some showing forth just quiet scenes like this under his eyes, and in words that would have added still a grace to its grace. As he could not obtain books, nor yet remember any more than vaguely, he did his best to satisfy himself with framing in his mind what some page might have contained. He found in that occupation a peculiar solace.

Sometimes Elizabeth, the daughter of the old shepherd whose hut he shared, came to him on the hill-side with a message, as often without, and tarried awhile sitting on the grass beside him.

She was a sweet creature, with quiet, slowly moving eyes. She fixed them on him while he spoke, wide and limpid, and he almost fancied he could see the thought he awakened dawning and growing in them; and when he ceased she half-dropped her eyelids and looked away sidewise, pondering with parted lips, fingering the end of one of her brown braids.

It was plain that she did not always understand when he amused himself with telling her what he had been thinking, and repeated to her the harmonious phrases he had built; but surely she liked to hear them. With that same look perhaps she would

have listened to a bird's singing, receiving just an impression of sweetness.

But something of it all she did understand. He knew it when she softly nodded to herself at some reference he made to the things with which she was familiar,— the changing colors of the landscape as the day declined, the summer sounds in the air, the pleasures and hardships of shepherds' lives.

She hardly ever laughed, and she seldom spoke,— from no deliberate reserve, nor shyness that he could discover; she seemed to feel no restless need for expression. Yet she fitly filled the horizon of his shepherd-life, just sitting as she did in the daisied grass with that peculiar not ungraceful stoop of her still rather angular young-woman shoulders, that were only half-hidden by her rough brown gown. Balm seemed to flow on him from her presence. She gave him peace, by example, by contagion. There was in her no effort to reveal or to conceal; she was as she happened to be, and thought not of it. She was akin in his thought of her to the little stolid serene hills that bounded his world for the time, shut him in from trouble and peril, and that he had grown so to love.

Not very often had she been with him where he fed his flock, but he did not think of the hill-side nor any pasture without her. The moments he recalled were always those in which her simple form had been outlined against his sky. In his imagination there could be no pastoral picture without her.

He could see her at this moment as if she had verily been before him as in the past. So dark she looked in the great air, though no doubt Nature had

meant her to be fair. The sun had gilded her skin over and over, season after season, but not unkindly, — smoothly and warmly, as if with an interest in preserving its clear tone. From the sunburned face her eyes looked out strangely light, the same misty gray-blue as the sky. Sun and wind and weather had roughened and faded her brown hair, yet not made it unbeautiful ; it drooped heavy and sheenless over her ears, and lay down her bosom in braids ; he remembered how it had an unexpected dull light streak along the forehead and ears. He always saw her with her mouth a little open, like a person who has wholly forgotten himself.

Nor did the hut ever rise in his mind but she was in it : sometimes resting on the low bench by the hearth, sometimes coming and going about such simple household duties as were hers, neither awkwardly nor dexterously, briskly nor languidly, but in complete unconsciousness of herself, with no purpose but that the thing she was about should be done.

Once he had allowed his sheep to stray, — he had been thinking of other things, — and the night had closed in. The old shepherd had rated him roundly. Then she had gone forth with him, and had found the sheep ; and she had brought the youngest lamb home in her arms. Most gracious of all the images that returned to him of her, was that image with a young lamb in her arms.

The shepherds ? The shepherds ? When he thought of the friendly shepherds, it was perhaps most of her he thought ; she seemed to represent them to him, to

embody all that good part of his life, when in the midst of a threatening sea he had come upon a little island, and resting there had grown strong for further battle with the never-resting deep.

They only in all the world — the shepherds only — had ever loved him ? Did he not perhaps mean that she alone among all women from her heart had loved him ? The shepherds, the men, had treated him as one of themselves, had jested with him and roughly used him, as no one beside had ever dared ; and that had rejoiced his manly heart. But had they loved him so much that he should yearn back over them ? Had they not long forgotten him ? And if they had, did it greatly matter ? But she, — had she forgotten him ?

And then he asked himself why he should think that she had loved him ; for never in the days when they were near had the thought clearly formed itself in his mind. Was it not this overwhelming loneliness, this sense of the shallowness and vanity of the world, this heartsickness, that made him create out of his own vast need for feeling himself beloved the illusion that Elizabeth had loved him ?

He thought of it long, — long. No, he could not make himself believe it an illusion. In a deep, unexplored chamber of his heart, the knowledge must have always lain ; but there had seemed no need for clear thought, still less for speech. She had not spoken her love, but she had not disguised it. The very remembrance of her that set him back in the past created about him an atmosphere of frank, still tenderness. Why, he wondered now in his heart-

hunger, looking back almost impatiently,— why had he not made it more, brought it to utterance, fixed this floating sweetness? Why not given himself something to remember in the days of dearth?

Then he recollected how they were ; how he was himself in those days grown so simple, perhaps with living out under the simple skies,— returned to the first man, reduced almost to being like a tree, that lets the leaves and blossoms take their own time to bud, ripen when they are ready.

And while all the wonderful harvest of flower and fruit was still only sap darkly flowing within the bark that gave no sign, the quiet time had ended. He had been forced to leap from the isle of truce back again into the troubled sea.

During the fight for life he had scarcely had leisure for regrets. But now that the desired haven was attained, and the fulfilment of his proudest worldly hopes left his soul unsatisfied, awakened in it nothing but longings for something different, altogether different,— he looked back to the island that a soft mist beautified, and resolved that there without knowing it he had been happy. He reproached himself that though Fate had forbidden he should stay, yet he had left lightly, without sufficiently feeling what he lost. He could find it in himself to grieve over it in due measure now.

But even as before on the doubt that his past happiness might be the creation of his own fancy, had risen the conviction of its reality ; now on his attempt to treat it in his mind as a reality, and derive comfort from it, rose the disquieting doubt that he

might after all have been building out of his imagination this with which to console himself ; and if it were a dream, he was indeed poor, poor as no beggar in his kingdom.

While he was suffering with this fear, a door opening let a gush of music to his ear. It brought to him the scene he had fled, the remembrance that civil courtiers must by this be searching for him with many a whispered, fertile comment on his ill-timed caprice. It filled him with loathing, mad longing for escape,—a tumult of feelings so angry and bitter and wretched that they could not be repressed. They shook him, they clamored for expression. They crowded upward until recognizing that the only expression of such hateful passions must be petty violence, unmanly lamentation, what dignity survived in him revolted. He called upon all his strength ; and he fought the tiger-furies one by one, conquered them right royally, and chained them down back in the dark dens of the heart. He arose strong from strife : all could be endured.

But once for an hour he should return among the shepherds as a shepherd,—not to satisfy any weak longing to look again on the face of Elizabeth : as a punishment he would do it, as a medicine.

A rage of severity toward himself made him in wishing to tear up the weeds from his heart uproot too the harmless flowers. If he saw the shepherds again, he said to himself with stern reasonableness, they would not seem to him as before. They would correct in him this distorted vision of themselves. He should not be haunted after that with this sense

of them that made the rest of the world cheap and distasteful ; he should find that they had amply forgotten him ; he should behold Elizabeth joined to a boor. He would come away and be at rest concerning them ; they would fade then from his mind, and the remembrance of days spent among them, accurately revived, would no longer by seeming so good make the rest of life so bad.

Once, for an hour !

It was long, however, before he went. He made himself accustomed to that thought of his delusion ; and when he had involuntarily slipped back into a sentimental musing over that time set apart from the rest of his life, he would pityingly scorn himself for self-indulgence.

He was young, — that king. It still mattered to him — not in so many words said to himself, it was his manner of being that it mattered to him — that a certain symmetry, harmony, should be established in his life. Symmetry, harmony, were not approached ; but the desire for them, the effort after them, never wholly slept.

It was perhaps not so much a sense that he was accountable for his use of himself, as an instinct, innate, toward things straight and seemly that created his necessity for feeling that he was in the measure of his powers worthy the reverence of spirits that he revered.

This æsthetic aspiration so worked that he could not bear to halt, to go bowed and groaning, to be a grotesque figure ; he must finally adjust himself to

his burden, whatever it were, and contrive to stand straight under it, making no concession to its power of galling,—and this to his own eyes more particularly than to the world's, which at this point of his life he felt to be incapable of understanding him or sympathizing with his thirst for abstract dignity.

Having said so much, I have to add that what I have said was not true of this king in an abundant measure. You will gather how far it was true from what remains of the story. For he was not a strong man; only, the same sense that commended to his admiration the stories of heroes, the noble sights of nature, the soul-stirring words of poets, and the beauty of pure, simple lives, made him wish to be strong and morally stately.

His life now was full of business; he had not much time left in which to feel himself happy or unhappy. The poignancy passed from his misery; as the man became more and more merged in the king, engrossed in cares of state, he felt less and still less that he was lonely, unmated, unfriended. He became used to the flatteries he heard, so that they did not offend him each like a sneer; they seemed a matter of course, like the blazons in the windows. Also, he became interested in the great game he played.

Still, at moments, without a reason but that the sky looked in such a way, the sadness that seemed ever lying in wait for him crept from its hiding, and took possession of his soul. Then all against his will, his shepherd days shone out fair and quiet and freshly green among the gray desolateness of his life; but he thought of them, when he did not condemn

his regret for them as arising from a conscious self-deceit, as if they had been an incident in the life of another man, as if those hills had long been swept from the face of the earth.

It was the young knight who had been his messenger when among the shepherds, and who knew his heart better than any other, who once divining his secret melancholy, anxious to suggest something that should divert him, asked if they should not as a pastime one day revisit the shepherds' little settlement.

The king at first set the suggestion aside; but with the satisfaction that another should have thought it a natural suggestion to make, grew the desire to seize on it. The thought came again and again, each time more importunate, till an emotion became attached to it, then a faint throb, like the echo of an old pulsation.

And at last he resolved to do what he had fully resolved once before; but not with the same end in view,—to punish and cure himself. Even the state of things in which that should be necessary seemed far behind. He would go in a contemplative, reasonable, philosophical mood. He would give himself this satisfaction as a recompense for having grown indifferent.

So he and his friend absented themselves on some plausible ground for a day or two, and disguised in the clothes which he had saved, early in the twilight, having begged his companion to remain behind, he climbed the little hill on the hip of which stood the hut.

So familiar, yet so unfamiliar all seemed. A hundred memories came rushing back upon him, — memories of common, frequently uncomfortable things that he had half forgotten. Not so easy a life had it been except on those fair mornings which had stuck in his memory to the blotting-out of all else. He felt retrospectively the chill of the rain which he had so often endured, the scorching of the sun, the anxiety concerning the number of his sheep, the fear of the wolf ; also, — which he had forgotten entirely, — the continuous disquiet of dreading discovery, the never sleeping suspicion that among the faces about him might be one of a traitor and spy.

And as he came in sight of the hut it seemed to him meaner and smaller than he had remembered. What lack of air must be in the tiny sleeping-places ! How one would suffer of it coming from the lofty kingly chambers, large and cool and perfumed ! How had he forgotten these things ?

Nevertheless his heart beat, — his heart, which was invincibly young, and could not take all quietly as his mind would have commanded. His heart beat unreasonably, and a mist came over his eyes, and he was forced to stop still and gather himself together, for his nerves seemed on the verge of falling into uncontrollable quivering.

The sky was gray, with a hint of soft sunset violet through it ; a hint of violet was in the fading green of the grass and trees. Stillness lay over all ; just a confused faint sound of animal life thrilled the cooling air.

The little hut looked at him from the distance as

with a human face ; its two windows peering like eyes through the hanging fringe of thatch ; its door-mouth closed, a feather of smoke curling up from its crown.

He was relieved at that sign, — the smoke.

He waited to see if no one would come out. He found himself confusedly preparing words with which to meet the shepherds, — stories to tell them.

He went a few steps, strong with his inventions, then stopped again, overwhelmed with an unaccustomed timidity. It was as if he had really been the shepherd they believed him, and embarrassed at not having made himself alive to them in so long.

His imagination offered him the probable scene of meeting, the questions which he should meet with lies, — for the idea of making himself known was far from him, he could not have endured a change in their relations, — and a repugnance so great overcame him that he was on the point of turning upon his heels, heart-sick, and returning thence without attempt at seeing them.

While he still hesitated, a dog rushed toward him, sniffed, and immediately recognizing him, gave such signs of unfeigned joy that he would have wished to catch the faithful animal in his arms and thank him.

He quieted the dog ; then strangely moved, and with an emotion ever increasing, he went toward the hut.

When he was quite near he stopped again ; he could not face them all at once, at first.

He leaned against a tree, one of a clump near

the hut, and waited to see if no one would come out ; — hoping in turn that some one would come, and that no one would come, — glad that he was still free to withdraw unseen, loath to give up that freedom, yet wishing that independently of his own will might be cut off the possibility of his returning as he came.

He waited some time, unsatisfied, surprised at the stillness. He knew that at this hour some of them had returned ; the smoke showed that one at least was at home.

His excitement subsided as he waited. At last he was possessed of himself, and able to reflect. If they had moved elsewhere ? His heart sank. But no, — it was their dog.

The twilight had faded still more ; the violet had ebbed from the gray ; a solemn whiteness dropped from the even single-colored clouds.

Once at such an hour Elizabeth and he had heard together standing there a bird unknown to them and never heard again after. It had a strange, plaintive note. When its voice had faded up the hill, they had tried to imitate it. The scene and the hour and the looks of the sky brought back to his mind vividly that incident. He whistled the bird-note tentatively, then with more assurance, once, — twice —

The door opened ; a figure that he could never mistake came toward him. He stepped to the edge of the shadow of the trees, and stopped, — no more than a gray blot, his shepherd's cloak about him, the shepherd's hood drawn over his face. She came nearer. He was half aware of an aching pain of suspense.

She approached with a step less free than he knew of her, as if almost she feared, one hand doubtfully outheld. He could hear her breathing as she pushed forward her face, trying to pierce the darkness of his hood. He did not know what kept him motionless.

“Is it thy ghost?” she asked huskily. “William! William!”

The old name! That was his name to them.

He caught her uncertain, groping hand, chill as stone, into his two warm ones, and for all answer laughed his living laugh.

Then there was silence, a long troubled silence; and a great dismay grew in him, and a tender, unbounded, yearning pity. He knew that she was crying, crying with all her soul, so that she could not speak,—that still, simple, inexpressive Elizabeth.

“Coine where there is more light,” he said abruptly, greatly troubled, he too, his heart trembling as the earth of old with the saints that were asleep rising from their graves; “I long to see thy face.”

She let him lead her away from the trees to the rough barriers of an empty sheepfold. They leaned against that, facing the west; and turned to one another, undisguisedly feeding their eyes upon each other’s long-lacked features. She presented her face shamelessly, all wet as it was. He saw how it had grown thin; it shocked him with its look of inexpressible want. It was easy to read in it what stood written so plain.

She said nothing; she only looked at him as if not daring to remove her eyes from his, lest he should have vanished.

"Didst thou think I should not come again?" he asked at last.

"How could I think?" she said, with that same voice roughened by her crying, so unlike the voices he heard — the polished, unctuous, courtly voices — yet sweet in his ears. "Thou hadst not told me. Each day in the morning when I rose, I said, 'He may come to-day;' and at night I said, 'He has not come.'"

"So many mornings! So many nights!" he exclaimed wonderingly, with a novel, subtle sweetness creeping through all his veins.

"It has been a longer year than ever any before." She stopped at that. There was in her tone neither reproach for him nor suggestion of self-pity; and still they looked at each other.

His hood had dropped back, and she might see how he was different. A dusky beard blurred the lines of his mouth and chin, which she must remember smooth; his face, formerly bronzed like her own, might well seem to her spectral in its present refined pallor.

A long silence fell on them again.

At last he said softly, "Tell me all."

She replied: "There's naught — but what thou knowest. Yes, this — They bid me wed Jude — Thou rememberest. But, Father in heaven! how should I wed?"

After a moment she pursued in a sharper voice, — more like other people's, other women's, — with a first vague intimation in it of doubts, self-torment, complaint, "Perhaps thou — perhaps —"

But she got no further. After a pitiful, ineffectual struggle for the word that should express her, she seemed to give up all hope in speech. For a moment her head drooped on her breast, then suddenly was lifted back; she unfolded her arms that had lain upon the barrier, and opened them fully, and let them drop heavily at her sides, turning to him with that helpless movement of baring her heart.

It was a gesture full of speech; it put words to shame.

“Fear not,” said the king then, casting his arm across her shoulders, and bringing his shepherd’s cloak about her with a large gesture of taking possession as a very king, and shutting his capture in away from all the world,—“fear not, but that I too love thee!”

And again there was silence,—long silence.

She stood against him, quiet, his great cloak half across her face.

Life for a little space was to him absolutely good. All the movement of life, in thought, in sensation, seemed brought to a wondrous stand-still; he seemed to hang poised as a broad-winged eagle, effortless, irresponsible, over an infinite, blissful, supporting element. His heart was as a goblet, neither wanting liquor nor yet overflowing,—a goblet at the moment in which the divine draught swells smoothly up above the brim, before its surface trembles and breaks, and one knows that the cup has been over-full. Yes, for a space life was to him absolutely, absolutely good.

They stood; they looked away toward the west,

that was still a little white. It had become too dark to see their faces.

The clouds with an insensible motion had flattened themselves out, had worn thin in places; at the point whereon the king's eyes were fixed now gleamed a star, watery and dim, then brighter; it kindled a faint reflection in the king's silent tears. For the eagle had felt its weight, and dropped a little; the goblet had brimmed over by a crimson drop or two.

The king gazed and gazed, standing motionless, with life still intense, greatly good, if no more perfect; and all that passed through his mind in that hour I will not describe.

The hills grew black; the clouds broke softly apart, and here and there let a star be seen as through a veil; a moist wind rose, and made in the trees a soft hushing noise, and brought a vague smell of freshly cut grass. The night was still and cool, and not very dark.

The king, in his fixed thought, forgot to breathe sometimes, and took up the function again with a long unconscious sigh.

Now and then he believed himself ready to speak, and his nerves stiffened; but they relaxed again as he said to himself, "Not yet,—not quite yet." And his heart let itself melt back into bliss, and his arm pressed heavier over Elizabeth's neck, and on her shoulder she felt his strong hand reassuring itself that it still held her.

The clouds softly closed again, and shut out every glimmer. How still she leaned,—how contented and

still ! If earth could but pass away while they stood so,—silent, and perfectly at one. But life is not made like that, he thought, reawakened to pain. A sense of life's struggles and sadnesses was again upon him ; but he felt courage to meet them,—an exalted courage that he seemed to have gained from the solemn night, the beautiful star, the contact of such heavenly goodness and purity and love as seemed to him hers.

And he said—and his own voice startled him, falling upon his ears harshly as the knell to those supreme moments in which he seemed to have risen to a place where human speech was a thing done with, outgrown, become superfluous—he said : “For a year I have been away from thee, and thou hast not ceased loving me. Nor have I ever for a moment ceased loving thee ; it is clear to me now. None, none have I loved but thee. And we are together again, and it makes us happy. Thou understandest all I say ?”

He heard no answer, but felt the slight movement of her head.

“But not all men were born to be happy,” he went on, feeling an increasing difficulty in framing his thought so that it should be plain to her at once,—“not William ! And not all women,—not Elizabeth !”

“Thou art going away again !” he heard her say, scarcely above a whisper. She did not move from him ; he felt her shoulders lifted sharply, but there came no sound of a groan.

He caught her closer, unendurably hurt with hurting her, and broke out with passionate mournfulness : “There is a curse upon me, my girl ! Trust me,

there is, though I cannot tell thee of it ! It is as a wall lying between us. We can never pass it over and reach each other, and have joy like others in simple earthly fashion. We were born to lives of sorrow, of renunciation, thou and I —

“ Yet not all of sorrow,” he said with recovered calm at last, turning his face up to the blank sky. He pursued with broad serenity : “ Whatever come to thy William hereafter, whatever of bitter and burning,— and there can come to him little else than things bitter and burning,— there will always be this thought to sweeten and cool the anguish : Elizabeth loves me. Life cannot be all bad while the greatest gift is mine, thy woman’s love. Love me, love me, love me, my girl ! never cease, never fail me. Let me know that this is sure as that the stars are shining somewhere, and I can make shift to endure most things.”

She turned her head a little inward, and kissed the garment over his breast.

“ I ought perhaps to bid thee forget me,— to wed another as they wish thee to. But I will not believe that thou couldst forget me,— I will not insult thy dear love. No, I bid thee love me always, and never doubt but wherever I am and however long I tarry,— and perhaps, my Elizabeth, I may not come again,— I too am loving thee with the best that is in me. Canst thou do so, until the end of everything ? ”

“ Thou knowest,” she said ; and her voice gave him a vision of her face, trembling yet brave.

“ Take courage, for my sake, because I bid thee, and fix thy mind on the good end. There are moments

when we seem to behold life as if we stood on a high hill, and it were a hamlet below that we could take in at a glance; seeing all clear that was intricate, — the little paths, the sudden turns. I am standing so; and the place which was large enough for me to lose myself while I wandered among its dark tortuous ways, seems to me such a little place, the station for a day. We can be patient easily," he asserted with large, grave confidence, "since we shall so soon be out of it! Then I will claim thee, thou shalt be my own; for in this moment is made sure to me our immortality. Thou dost not understand me at all. Through the darkness I feel thy great light eyes wondering. Ah, thy understanding or not little matters. I shall have time to teach thee. And thou wilt understand the more easily, that this night's good thoughts are derived only from thee: the neighborhood of thy simple goodness has so lifted me above myself and all in me that is common man that I could reach and lay hold of them. So it is truly thou that teachest me, thou of the fruitful silences."

Silence again fell on them. Then he tried to find the simplest words for her. "Thou wilt live on as thou hast lived, feeding thy sheep, caring for thy little lambs, doing thy duties. Will it seem so very hard now that thou knowest my heart? But thou must not pine, thou must not watch for me, and feel when I do not come this anguish that wastes the face I love. Thou must hold fast to this: My love loves me. And I will do the same. And if there should come an upheaval, a great

change in the order of things, it might be that I returned to thee even before our earthly days are passed, and that we fed flocks together. But we may not hope for that.

“Oh, life is hard!” he exclaimed. “Oh, it is hard to part. But let us thank God for this one thing,” he added almost solemnly, — “that we do love. This golden hour has held wealth for a lifetime, and I shall bless God whatever else he do to me.”

He bent, crushing her more than ever close to him, and kissed her before releasing her.

She shivered when he put her from him, finding the world cold. He took the cloak from himself and folded it around her.

Then he pointed in the direction of the hut and asked, “Are they within?”

She shook her head. “They are gone forth to destroy a wolf.”

It was a relief that he should not meet them. He could not descend from his high mood yet awhile.

He turned toward the cottage, and she followed him.

When they were inside, she bent over the embers and kindled a rushlight at them. He looked about: nothing had changed, it was as if he had been gone no more than overnight.

He dropped on the settle by the hearth, and she brought him goat’s milk in a wooden bowl.

Then he saw her as if for the first time, and she appeared to him the most lovable being the world contained. He wondered if she appeared beautiful to others, and could not in the least judge if she were

such as must please the common eye, she had so supremely the gift of pleasing him. To him she seemed to be conforming in every line and hue and movement to some deep, simple, sacred, eternal law of beauty.

She had changed a little. Her dumb sorrow had moulded her features to a more expressive purpose. At the same time her body had attained an added grace of womanliness. He joyed in the sight of her. Those light steady eyes looking out of her dark face had to him the cool dewy sweetness of dawn; that drooping hair shone on by the sun, stroked by the wind, and rained on by the heavens, seemed to him to have retained some quality of those pure elements, — a glint of light, a freshness of rain, a bitter-sweet fragrance of air that has been stirring among fruit-trees in blossom, over wet moss.

The rest of womankind was set to shame by her, — all the well-born ladies with their mincing graces, their reds and whites and civet-cat perfumes, and artfully curled hair, shamed by a shepherdess who did not seem to feel herself be, who never knew of beauty, whose breath lifted her coarse gown all undisturbed by envious dreams of their elegance. She was the only woman on earth, all the others pretences, emptiness, — she only real as the rocks with the pale green and purple lichens on them, she only worth counting. And she loved him without question, without consideration, not knowing what he was. His heart exulted particularly over that last; and his soul went out in blessings on her for living, gratitude to her for loving him.

He had almost feared to see in her face her grief at their parting. But something she had caught from his words that set her in a mood akin to his own. Her face shone too as if she were coming from some high conversation ; her eyes were filled with a noble light of faith, — those clear ignorant eyes from which not only evil but all knowledge of evil seemed to him absent ; her lips now softly sealed expressed to him infinite obedience, patience for a lifetime. She was not weak, she was his peer, — nay, she was above him, though she could not talk of these things, perhaps not even to herself.

They sat for a long time on the opposite sides of the hearth without speaking, taking with their eyes a last cognizance of each other's face, not relenting, though he grew pale and paler.

At last he shook himself and rose ; for a great numbing fatigue was creeping over him, and he felt his heroism ebbing. She too rose and followed him to the door, and a little way into the darkness ; then suddenly she stopped short without a word, and let him go his way alone.

For a long time the impression of that scene remained clear-cut and vivid in his consciousness, and helped to make his life better.

The thought of her was as a flawless gem that he could draw forth when he was alone, and gaze on, feeling himself inestimably rich.

But his was a king's life, full of business and the work of pleasure ; and wave after wave of sensation flowing in over that treasured impression blurred the

lines of it a little, then more, — altered its face a little, then more.

We know how painfully, when he first came to his inheritance, he was impressed by the falseness of his relation to other men ; how he hated the flatteries of the court, the pretences, the machinations ; how the untruth of those about him offended, the unreality of his splendid-seeming life oppressed him, — how altogether the atmosphere of the court was difficult for him to breathe. He was a gentle and an honest man, and sufficiently brave too ; but he had not the incisive strength to hew into a shape he preferred the things he found fault with. In his heart he shrank from harsh measures, — from giving surprise and pain even to the evil. He was doubtful of himself, temporizing. Now the things one cannot change, or that one will not fight against to change, one must end by countenancing ; and after patience comes reconciliation, and after that, presently, indifference.

The air of the court ceased to offend the king's lungs ; it became his natural breathing-stuff. Custom laid hold of him with a thousand insidious meshes, and tied him down passive, agreeing, among those whom he had despised when he first came in his zealous youth from among the hills where had been fostered his ideals.

At last he looked back upon those times almost with pity, and smiled to himself wisely, "That was poetry."

Now there is no reason for a man's being a hero, except a reason I cannot well define, — what know I ? — a standard that lives within himself, an adoring

reverence for dead heroes perhaps, and a wish not to disclaim them by his own deeds. There is no reason for a man's being holy except a sense within himself of the beauty of holiness. No one outside required of the king to be heroic or to be holy; it rested with his own soul. And as that got further from his early youth, its ideals, no longer nourished by quiet communion with spirits beautiful, dwindled, became dimmed; he looked upon old reserves of his thought as idle sentiment,—“dreams!” he called many of the things he had worshipped. He thought that he was waking to a sense of real life, when perhaps he was only going to sleep to a part of life. He tried to apply the wisdom recently gained from things and people about him in this noisy, unrestful life to old experiences,—persons formerly known,—and judged anew many things once deemed high were degraded.

There had been in his life a shepherdess; that remained one of the chief points in his history. She had loved him so truly, without knowing of his power and wealth,—his power to give her power and wealth. He laughed a little at the curious adventure, but only superficially: in his deep heart that remembrance had always power to move him. A silent, beautiful girl,—who still loved him, perhaps! He wondered, did she? But that also only superficially.

He regarded her differently from before. He had thought of her as a creature of a character almost unfeatured,—rude, large perfection, without detail, without intricacy. Now from his knowledge of others he ventured retrospectively to study her, to suppose true of her something like what was truth

of the mass. He realized that he did not know her; that she was built out of his imagination, made up of attributes that belong to divinity. He drew her from her simple setting; he made history for her. A certain case given, would she do this, would she do that? So he had in thought finally dragged her from her heights to the level of his present; he had become reasonable, discriminating about her,—in fact, he had become incapable of believing in his earlier conception of her.

A poor shepherdess had loved him as a poor shepherd. Would she love the same man less as king? Why not more,—with awakened ambition and vanity gratified in addition to tenderer passions? A king must seem so great and splendid to a shepherdess! How easy is everything to a king! He has but to command. Why should he suffer for want of a thing not out of reach? And as the old way of thinking about Elizabeth was weakened, his need for her presence seemed to increase.

He was less happy truly than even before, when he had been so unhappy. Then he had known what it was that distressed him, and he had set himself to bearing it; now he suffered from a carking melancholy, in itself the affliction, which he did not examine,—and find resolve itself into a deep, restless self-dissatisfaction, survival of his better self,—but merely tried to get away from. He was ever wishing for something, whatever it might be, that would make him happy, a little happier. And in this search, still disappointed, more and more often his thought turned to Elizabeth. For she, after all, was the

being he loved, the one whose thought was best to him ; and she remained the only one whom he could trust to have loved him. A desire to reward her for that went hand in hand with his desire to seek an alleviation to his unhappiness in seeing her again. He told himself that it would only be just ; he was a great king, and could richly reward. She knew nothing of splendors ; but was there a reason to suppose that she would not care for them when known ? It was part of every woman, however unformed, to love ease and splendor ; he had seen that enough.

Sometimes, at the first of them, he pulled himself up in these thoughts of her with a feeling of shame, and tried to restore her to her summits. But soon again that seemed to him the fool's part ; and he took up the thread of his thoughts where he had broken it off.

“Would she not come to him ?” he asked at last, and was abashed at the desperate boldness of the idea.

But he became used to it, and asked it again.

“Would she not come to him ?” The thought that she might, that the world might so all be changed, kept sleep from his eyes many an hour. What might not life become if at the end of the weary day spent among these people who were none of his own, he could find her, the gentle, bounteous, kindred creature, who alone for some mysterious reason could completely please him, and forget at her side his annoyances ! He remembered well what healing had always flowed on him from her vicinity, how she could soothe and lull by the unconscious

spell of those quiet eyes. What inexplicable well-being he had always felt at her side! No need for speech; repose, content, as of a monumental summer-cloud slowly moving across the sky, silently absorbing sunlight. Would she refuse him this?

He overleaped in his picturings all explanations, revelations, for the sight was still full of stabs and discomforts; he placed her at once in the palace he should adorn for her, clothed her regally, and saw her shine and bloom among the women who should surround her to do her bidding,—her silence passing for pride, her slowness for dignity. Would she not be fair to behold with the golden circlet in her hair, and the great jewel gleaming on her forehead, with heavy silk and fur hanging from her shoulders? The wind from heaven should not touch her freely any more, so she would grow fair as the lily, her hair would become like burnished bronze; and no one who saw her divine that she was a poor shepherdess.

But would she come? When the thought of her being near him had become so dear that he could not give it up and bear his life, the question of summoning her must be faced and studied. His ultimate thought was always that what he wished she must inevitably do, that his will was hers, that she trusted him entirely. But that in itself, instead of giving him undivided joy, held a peculiar pang. She trusted him to love her; perhaps loving to the simple understood wanting the best for the beloved,—and was this that shone before his eyes, this that meant, he believed, such bliss to him, the best for her? Her little dream of love, if she dreamed, must have

been that her dear shepherd-lad should come to her, and that they should live together in peace and innocence, — a sight pleasing to God, — have all their simple joys and sorrows in common, be each the other's world. Would he not be preparing in her world the way to strange sorrows? — disturbing that deep peace, undoing all that made her Elizabeth?

He had moments, sometimes waking, sometimes sleeping, when his interview with Elizabeth became a horror to him; when she looked at him with great eyes in the depths of which had grown a fear of him, a vast unspeakable trouble, a bewilderment, — as if the earth had failed beneath her feet, the sun proved untrue, God forgotten her, — and he wished to get away from her gaze, feeling small. Oppressed by the anguish that crept through him when he had faced such a vision, he seemed to be crying out to her: "Only forget! only let all be as before!"

But again he would think of her as taking whatever came to her from him with unquestioning submission, with eagerness only to show him love, — more love, no thought of herself or abstract things, only gratitude to be with him, only gladness to see his eyes, to feel his hand. He could fancy her joying that he had thought to do as he had, not to leave her lonely forever on her hills, but to take her to him and show her all life might have for them both. He made her in that mood even delight in her new surrounding; he watched her unfolding appreciation of things rich and beautiful, and felt her happiness to be a justification to him. He vowed that she should never repent a thing done for love of him.

No one who could cast blame upon her should be suffered near. He would protect her well.

But which of these visions forecast the future ? One presented itself as often as the other, and long he could not choose either for its probability. And dismay followed one, joy followed the other. But sometimes a sort of exultation in her mixed with his agonized humiliation at the first vision ; and sometimes a sort of humiliation, an anguish mixed with his exultation in the second.

Which ? Which ? He was haunted by the question.

But as time went, the second vision, which in his earthly yearning appealed to him more, became more frequent ; and the need for assuring himself that his surmise of its greater likelihood was correct, more imperative. If he should not venture to brave defeat, he could never gain the joy of triumph ; and this triumph seemed to him every day more the best that earth contained, the only thing that could assuage his unrest, quell his never-sleeping yearning after happiness. And his days from the outside were becoming so full of disquiet, of tumult, that he needed indeed that something should be good to him ; he needed a faithful pillow for his head tired every day more with the cares of a kingdom. For the Usurper had gained strength, and the land was again full of dissent. Once he could have resigned his great office readily ; once he did not wish to be king ; but he could no more : the thirst for power had grown upon him, the success of his darling schemes moreover depended upon it. He could not return

to be a shepherd,—that dream belonged to his outgrown self. He must haste to obtain his ends before the times should become too unquiet,—he must haste to enjoy while he might.

A disused manse, hid in the depths of a great park, was secretly prepared with every care he could devise for the coming of his love. He had moments of almost forgetting his troubles in planning perfection for it. Unused as her eyes were to magnificence, she should yet have the most splendid dwelling of all; he would not slight her, but do her more honor than to any,—yet secretly, for her own sake.

And the times became more unquiet before he could make up his mind to the last step. And feeling his courage still unequal to satisfying himself as to which of the two visions should work itself out in life, he said that he had best wait until the turmoil was over. He would crush all his opposers, then give himself to his happiness undisturbed. He could find strength unconquerable to hew his path through those who stood between him and his love,—if beyond the struggle lay quiet life with her.

So when the time came he buckled himself into his sable armor with high courage, with grim determination to overcome.

And he fought several battles, and he felt himself invincible, until the very moment in which he was vanquished.

A casual steel point wielded by an obscure hand changed the face of the earth for him. At morning he had felt himself the match for any giant, and had

sat proudly erect on his war-horse, with flashing eye and swelling nostril, a magnificent terror. At night-fall he lay undistinguished, little to be feared, half under a heap of other men. His soul would not leave his body. It seemed to him a century since he had dropped. There had been lapses in his consciousness that could not have lasted less than years. He opened his eyes once, and saw nothing but blue above him, — cool, delicate, swimming blue ; he seemed to float upward and melt away into it. Again he opened his eyes. He saw long purple islands hemmed in with burning red rocks in a golden sea ; they were darkened, and he neither saw nor knew.

Then again he opened his eyes, and for a time was in utter darkness, and wondered, till he found gold-dust raining down upon him ; when the shower ceased, little fixed points of gold studded all above him. It came back to him like a forgotten story that it was the firmament ; and he remembered vaguely things that had happened to some one some time, — probably himself. Thank God that the din and dust were over, and all quite still at last !

He could not stir, but he did not wish to stir. The end of the story, — the short, little, unimportant story. Amen ! Why should one make such an ado, want so many things so much, fight for them so hard with these tired muscles strained to breaking, — and this the end ! Only water he wanted now, enough to wet lips and throat. But even that he did not want much, not so much as he had wanted less important things, — his crown for one. Still, a little, just a little water. There was so much water in the

world ! The image of a well-known spring under arching trees rose in his mind. He heard it gurgle ; he saw it tremble lucid over the pale round stones, and Elizabeth was near it as she had been. She bent and drank ; and he saw himself bending and setting his mouth to it. But what a delusion ! She was not there. That was long ago, and he was parched as before drinking. She was in her splendid chamber ; she drank wine from chiselled gold. If he could but get to her, and she would pour him wine in the cup set with cool gems. If she would take his head on her shoulder, and help him let his soul smoothly loose,—his soul that could not get past his throat. Elizabeth ! What would become of her in her gorgeous palace without him ? God ! would not they drive her forth, now that she was not a great king's love any more, and take all from her, and treat her with scorn ? No, no ! what was he thinking of ? All that had never happened,—all that was in the future,—and there were no more to-morrows to make up a future. Elizabeth would not even know that he was dead. She would only hear perhaps that the king had been slain, and would go on waiting for Williani patiently from dawn to eve, with her quiet eyes, her quiet bosom. He would like to see her, to tell her not to wait any more. It wearied him to think of day after day, with soul half out of body, hiccoughing in the throat. He would like to be with her, and that she should give him a bowl of goat's milk, as that last time. If he could but get to her now !—to the devoted one who once had given up all to come to him ! Ah, no ! there was his brain

again, with that insane new trick of distorting things. She had not come ; she only would have come if he had had time to implore her. He had not had time. Nay, but would she ? The old tormenting question ! With its teasing insistence, it made his poor soul sick. In this extremity, when no joy could come to him any more of anything, it seemed — as if by a fore-glimmer of the strange new dawn coming to cast over all its dreadful clearness — an awful responsibility to have helped another soul to remorse ; he wished he might believe that if he had lived he would have tempted no one,—not, above all, one who loved him. He would wish to go forth into the vast, dim after-world,— where the hues and proportions of all things would be changed, and the invisible, only half-realized God, whom one lightly disobeyed while blood was hot in the veins, become to the chilly out-cast ghost the great reality,— clean at least of that. He wished he might believe that she would have had wisdom, sainted wisdom to refuse. Was she not such that God might prompt her in her ignorance ? But alas, alas, he had grown so used, having so ardently wished it true, to the thought that she would come for his asking !

Now, while with his eyes up to the heavens he was thinking ever more wanderingly of these things, suffering nothing much,— scarcely even thirst and cold, and those less and less,— he felt himself disturbed, dazzled a moment, lifted. He felt his weight painfully ; he suffered inexpressibly, without power to sob, as the thing he rested upon moved and rolled beneath him. He lay forward on his face, with limbs

hanging. He weakly longed for the earth to lie still; then he was lost to all sensation.

Suddenly a voice saying in a husky whisper, "William! William!" brought him back from very far. He opened his eyes; his head was so propped that for a minute he only saw by the glimmer of a rushlight his own body, strangely magnified, stretching out before him,—the mailed feet, the quartered tunie, blue and crimson, with gold dragons in the crimson and red roses in the blue,—a different red spread horridly about the great rent cleaving the dragons in two. He saw faces peering at him, familiar faces, but with an unfamiliar look to them. He knew that old man staring awed through his bushy white eyebrows, muttering, "The King, say ye!"

A whisper, "The King! The King!" passed like a gust of wind in the trees.

Then a subdued voice said, "He is to lie hidden here again until he recover of his hurt. The leech will not be long coming. God help him!" the voice ended choking.

His brain was clear now, his eyes sharper than ever in health, his hearing keener. He could see the flash of every little link and plate of his armor lying near on the floor; he could distinguish between the breathings of the watchers about him. He knew it was an arm beneath his neck, a shoulder under his cheek. If he could but lift his heavy, heavy eyes, he knew what face he should see above him. As if his struggle to look up had been felt, the face bent and looked into his, while the breath that had been fanning him stopped.

His eyes seemed to swim up into her eyes, and lose themselves there: the same eyes, the eyes of his utmost love, — filled with anguish, but the same eyes, through which Heaven made itself understood, — tender, knowing nothing of evil, of treason, of snares, of troubled love, of temptation, of repentance. All the time since he had parted from her of a sudden seemed a dream, a bad dream. What was all that about: Would she come to him? Would she not come to him? What need to revolve the question, since it was never to be asked? From the first it was never to have been! God had amply provided. Such struggles, such doubts, and all so simple in the end! He could not grieve that he was leaving her; for the something that could have grieved seemed dead already. His eyes became stony upon her face. He saw the brows drawn together over the widened eyes shadowily bending over him. He could see nothing but those eyes, to his sense growing larger and larger; he saw terrible tears crowd over their fixed stare.

He smiled faintly at the feeling of relief that had passed over him like a pleasant wind; all his body relaxed with the comfort of it. She saw his mouth move, and brought the eyes still nearer. A little gasp, almost like a laugh, came from his lips; it made itself into the irrelevant words, showing that he was already past taking account, "And I shall never know—" Then the smile died, and he murmured more peacefully, "Praise God!"

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